

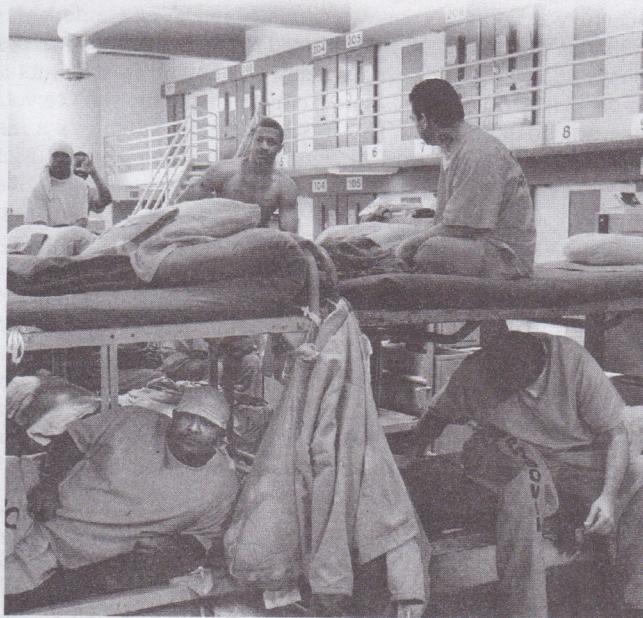
Black History and the Class Struggle

No. 24



150 Years Since the Emancipation Proclamation— Finish the Civil War!

For Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!



2013 marked 150 years since the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared that those held as slaves in the rebellious Southern states “henceforward shall be free.” Accomplished by the Northern victory in the Civil War, the abolition of slavery was the last progressive act of the American capitalist class. Abolishing slavery was necessary for capitalism to develop further, just as today the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism is necessary to open the road to socialism. Serving in the Union Army and Navy, 200,000 black men—both escaped slaves and free men from the North—participated in the liberation struggle arms in hand. Our article on the Proclamation analyzes the background to this important event and discusses the relationship between the political and military aspects of the Civil

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Introduction

War. Also included here is our review of Steven Spielberg's 2012 film, *Lincoln*.

Once the South was subdued and the country united under the domination of Northern capital, the common interests of the capitalist ruling class and the former slaves came to an end. The promise of post-war Reconstruction was betrayed: the former slaves were subjugated by other forms of exploitation, while being socially segregated at the bottom of society. That outcome continues to shape this country.

It needs to be noted that a reader wrote to *Workers Vanguard* objecting to our use of the phrase “poor white trash” (see page 17 in this pamphlet) to describe President Andrew Johnson, a former slaveholder and stone racist, objecting that the phrase “implicitly expresses contempt for the poor and powerless.” In WV's reply we acknowledged that a better formulation would be that “Johnson had the mentality of what the lords of the lash called ‘poor white trash,’” noting that “poor whites were worth less to the planter aristocracy than were black slaves.”

A century and a half after the Emancipation Proclamation, the killer of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin went free after a Florida jury found him not guilty of murder. The racist vigilante, George Zimmerman, argued “self-defense,” claiming that the appearance on the scene of a young black man in a hooded sweatshirt made him afraid for his life. In a 17 July 2013 leaflet, the Spartacist League wrote: “George Zimmerman got away with the coldblooded killing of Trayvon Martin. Not even a slap on the wrist, nothing. The verdict is the 21st-century echo of Chief Justice Taney's infamous declaration in the Supreme Court's 1857 Dred Scott decision that black people ‘had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.’”

The leaflet noted that the American “justice” system had “worked according to script.” It also pointed out that “the only unusual thing was that Trayvon wasn't gunned down by a cop, the fate of so many young black men in this country.” The twisted logic of the murder of Trayvon Martin was chillingly echoed, again in Florida, when Jordan Davis was gunned down inside a car because white racist Michael Dunn objected to the rap

music that Davis and his friends were listening to.

Trayvon Martin, not his killer, was put on trial in the court and in the media. The verdict triggered deep indignation. The article on the case that is included in this pamphlet links together such racist crimes with the impersonal investment decisions of the capitalist class that devastated the city of Detroit, once a center of integrated union power and black radical politics, but now a capital of joblessness and the theft of retired workers' pensions.

This year, as President Obama crowed over the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the unintended irony was hard to miss. The passage of that law was made possible by courageous students and working people who braved violent attacks from racist mobs and Southern sheriffs by protesting against segregation and discrimination and by organizing black citizens to vote. Today, from the Supreme Court on down, reactionaries are on the attack against virtually every gain of the civil rights movement, from voting rights and desegregation of public schools to even minimal affirmative action programs in college admissions.

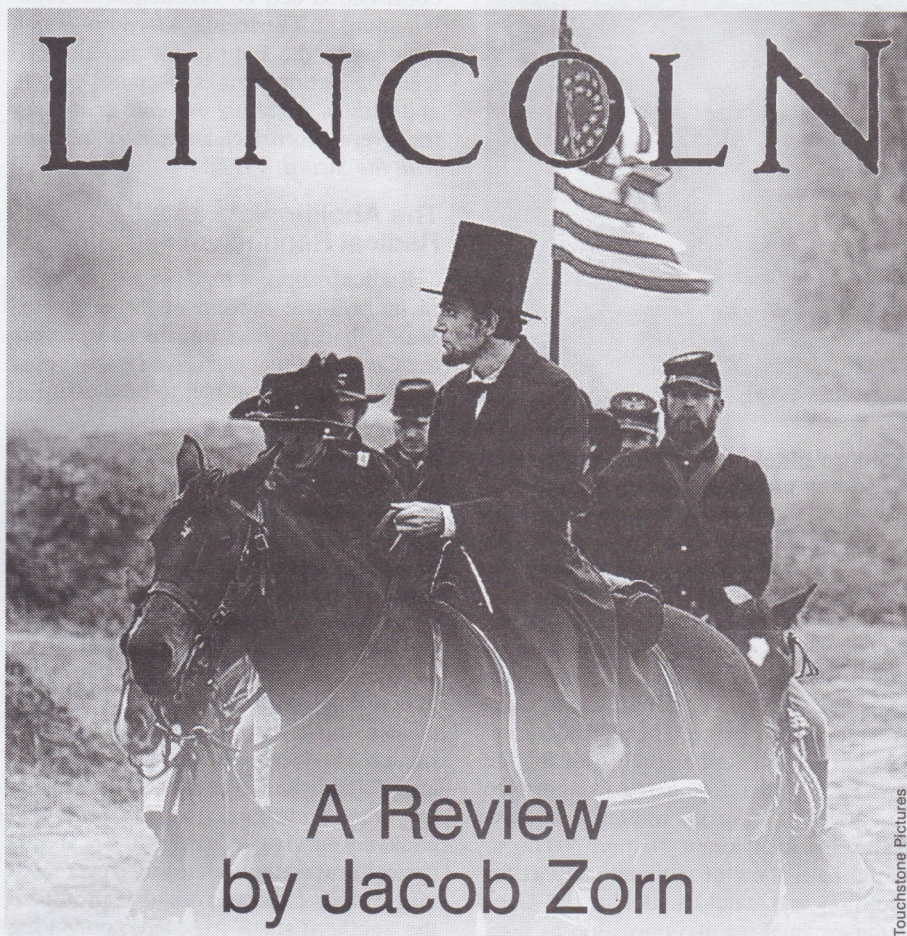
Our article on “Mass Incarceration and Black Oppression in America” deals with Michelle Alexander's acclaimed 2010 book, *The New Jim Crow*, which drew attention to the draconian drug laws which have ensnared a huge swath of the young black male population in the machinery of capitalist repression. The article “Supreme Court Spits on Black Rights” discusses the gutting of voting rights; since its publication, numerous states, especially in the ex-Confederacy, have instituted stiffer requirements to prevent as many blacks and immigrants as possible from exercising the right to vote.

Two articles deal with significant historical figures of the 20th century. Malcolm X was a contradictory political figure but we honor him for championing the right of self-defense against racist violence and for telling the truth about the revered civil rights leaders whose first concern was keeping the movement “moderate” and pro-government. In his biography of Malcolm X, Professor Manning Marable's own politics, notably his support for Barack Obama, led him to paint

continued on page 63

Cover graphics: Top: Black troops fight against slavery at Port Hudson, Louisiana, May 1863. Below: Protest against racist vigilante killing of Trayvon Martin in Florida (right); inmates in state prison in Lancaster, California. Today, 150 years after Emancipation Proclamation, black liberation requires socialist revolution to finish the Civil War. Credits: Top: Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper; below: AP photos.

Civil War, Not Compromise, Smashed Slavery



Lincoln—Steven Spielberg's new movie based on a screenplay by Tony Kushner—begins with a battle scene that highlights the bravery of black soldiers, some 200,000 of whom fought in the Civil War. Two of them are seen talking to President Lincoln and criticizing the Union Army's racist policies, paying blacks less than whites and preventing them from advancing to officers. One of the soldiers wonders whether blacks will have the vote in a hundred years. This sequence hints at the crucial role played by black soldiers in the armed struggle that broke the slave power in the South, but the film then entirely switches gears.

The movie's plot reduces the abolition of slavery to so many parliamentary maneuvers by the wise and clever Lincoln to get the House of Representatives in early 1865 to pass the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which abolished slavery. In the process, it distorts the significance of the Amendment and

the role of the abolitionists, who were the main force, then and for decades before, pushing for an end to slavery.

To its credit, *Lincoln* is forthright that the Civil War was about slavery and does depict Lincoln, with all his contradictions and strengths, as devoted to not just winning the war but smashing the Southern slavocracy. The movie is based in part on a chapter in Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals, The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (2005). While other historians—particularly James McPherson, who wrote the classic *Battle Cry of Freedom* (1988), and Eric Foner—present a deeper understanding of the social and political forces at work in the Civil War, Goodwin's book underscores Lincoln's political genius and canny leadership in leading the North to victory.

The opening scene is done in a manner to wrongly suggest that racial oppression is a relic of the past long since overcome. The not-too-thinly-disguised

goal of the movie is to laud President Obama and to underline how he, supposedly like Lincoln, should seek "bipartisan" compromises with adversaries. By extension, his left critics are expected to give the president a break. When interviewed on NPR, Kushner gushed about what a great president Barack Obama is and what a "blessing" it was to see "the Obama years through a Lincoln lens." Kushner then rhapsodized about the virtues of compromise and horse trading. This message was not lost on most of the bourgeois commentary on the film—as shown in the *L.A. Times* (28 November 2012) headline: "Gov. Jerry Brown Could Learn a Lesson From 'Lincoln'."

Lincoln is not without entertainment value, with its excellent acting by Daniel Day-Lewis (as Lincoln) and Tommy Lee Jones (as Pennsylvania Republican Congressman and abolitionist Thaddeus Stevens). If the only problem of the movie was simply the narrow focus of its plot, it could be partly alleviated by watching it in conjunction with the superb movie *Glory*. An inspiring portrayal of the black soldiers in the Massachusetts 54th regiment, *Glory* gives a sense of what was required for Union victory in a way that *Lincoln* does not.

But the main weakness of *Lincoln* is that in trying to show the Lincoln years through the Obama lens the movie distorts history. Barack Obama is Commander-in-Chief of a capitalist system long into its imperialist epoch of decay. The Civil War was the last great progressive act of the American bourgeoisie. To further the consolidation of industrial capitalism, when the exploitation of free labor represented an historical advance, the North was compelled to destroy the system of chattel slavery in the South. Today racist U.S. imperialism continues to carry out what has been more than a century of pillage and war across the globe, brutally exploiting labor at home and abroad while qualitatively arresting wider social and economic development. The American capitalist rulers are the main enemy of the world's working people and oppressed.

It will serve some good if *Lincoln* piques interest in the Civil War among its viewers. But it must be understood that the movie obscures the fact that only a social revolution could have uprooted slavery, smashing everything that stood in its way. By the same token, it will take

a socialist revolution by the proletariat and its allies to eradicate capitalist wage slavery.

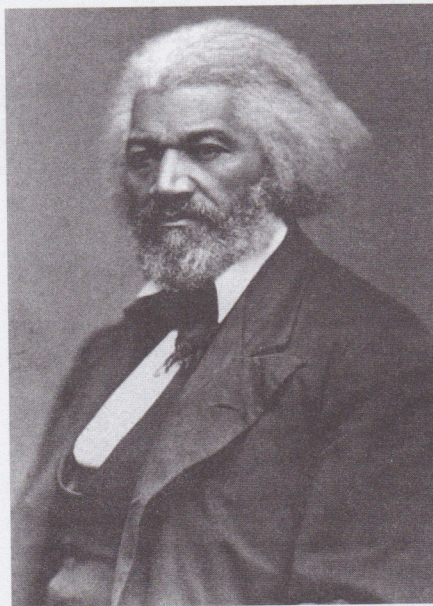
The Thirteenth Amendment

The Thirteenth Amendment, which had its origins in a petition campaign by anti-slavery women suffragettes in early 1864, states: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." The Thirteenth Amendment codified the end of slavery. Lincoln's insistence that his generals fight to crush the opposing Confederate armies, and not his search for "bipartisanship," paved the way for the passage of the Amendment.

In July 1862, as slaves were fleeing Southern plantations and seeking freedom behind Union Army lines, Congress authorized the "confiscation"—i.e., emancipation—of Confederates' slaves. In January 1863, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which he had drafted the previous September. It declared that slaves in Confederate-controlled areas "shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free." With the Proclamation, the war openly became a social revolution to emancipate an oppressed class, the chattel slaves, and destroy an oppressor class, the slave masters. The Emancipation Proclamation also sanctioned the recruitment of black soldiers, such as those Lincoln visited in the first scene of the movie.

The revolutionary aspect of the war was resisted by many Northerners, especially those in the Democratic Party, which was the party that ran the slave South. These Northern Democrats—the so-called "Copperheads"—were antiwar and opposed abolition. In the movie, their main spokesman is Democratic Congressman Fernando Wood, a former mayor of New York City. The clash of the two parties came to a head in the election of 1864, when the Democrats ran General George B. McClellan—whom Lincoln had fired as the commanding general of the Union Army because he refused to fight to win the war. Meanwhile, with Ulysses S. Grant in charge, the tide of the war had begun to decisively turn, and the Union Army was on an offensive through the South.

In the election, the Democrats' slogan was "The Constitution As It Is and the Union As It Was." In other words, end the war and keep slavery. McClellan was decisively defeated, winning only New Jersey and the border states Delaware and Kentucky. Lincoln's victory signaled support for continuing the war until the slavocracy was defeated, with the Republicans gaining enough seats in Congress to guarantee



Frederick Douglass House

Leading black abolitionist Frederick Douglass campaigned for black enlistment in the Union Army.

passage of the Thirteenth Amendment.

From Lincoln's perspective, the question was not whether slavery would be abolished, but whether the Amendment would be passed by the outgoing Congress in early 1865 or the incoming Congress later that spring. This consideration was not trivial. Rather than wait for the new Republican-dominated Congress to be convened, Lincoln wanted it to pass with some Democratic support. To do so would be a show of national support for abolition and would undercut the Copperheads, making it impossible to conclude peace on any basis except abolition.

The movie shows in detail how Lincoln—mainly acting through his secretary of state, William H. Seward—manipulated, cajoled, flattered and bribed various Democrats to support the Amendment. In the end, he obtained enough support from "lame duck" Democratic Congressmen to get it passed. Rather than the culmination of the Civil War, the drama in Congress represented a sideshow—albeit an important one—to the abolition of slavery. Eric Foner stressed in a letter to the *New York Times* (26 November 2012) about the movie: "Even as the House debated, [Union general] Sherman's army was marching into South Carolina, and slaves were sacking plantation homes and seizing land. Slavery died on the ground, not just in the White House and the House of Representatives."

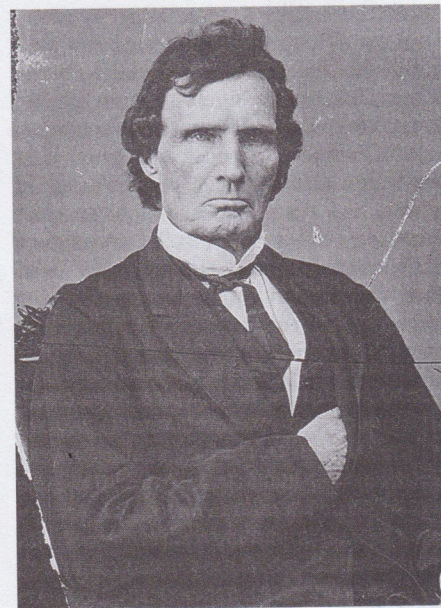
The viewer would not know from the movie that to become law, amendments must be ratified by three-fourths of the states. When this happened in December 1865, it was because the North had mili-

tarily defeated the Confederacy. Among the states that ratified the Thirteenth Amendment were several in the South. James McPherson captured the real lesson of its adoption when he wrote: "Without the Civil War there would have been no confiscation act, no Emancipation Proclamation, no Thirteenth Amendment (not to mention the Fourteenth and the Fifteenth), certainly no self-emancipation, and almost certainly no end of slavery for several more decades at least" (*Drawn with the Sword*, 1997).

The Abolitionists and Radical Republicans

Radical abolitionism, the first interracial political movement in the United States, had pointed out decades before the Civil War that the slave system could not be reformed but had to be destroyed. At the time, mainstream politicians either essentially ignored slavery (the Whig Party) or supported it (the Democratic Party). For their bravery, the abolitionists were attacked, denounced and belittled.

The more farsighted elements of the capitalist class in the North eventually coalesced into the Republican Party. At the time of the 1860 presidential election, the Republican Party was not an abolitionist party, and Lincoln, its candidate, wanted only to limit slavery from expanding into the West. But both the slavocracy and Republicans understood that if slavery were prevented from expanding, it could not survive, in large part because its agricultural methods demanded ever more virgin soil. Lincoln's victory prompted the Southern states to secede, provoking the Civil War. From its outset, the abolitionists understood that slavery was the



Library of Congress

Radical abolitionist Thaddeus Stevens

central issue. Former slave and abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass insisted that it was futile to “separate the freedom of the slave from the victory of the government.” He declared: “War for the destruction of liberty must be met with war for the destruction of slavery.”

This was underlined by Karl Marx, who from London agitated among British workers in support of the North. In “The Civil War in the United States” (October 1861), Marx stressed: “The present struggle between the South and North is, therefore, nothing but a struggle between two social systems, the system of slavery and the system of free labour. The struggle has broken out because the two systems can no longer live peacefully side by side on the North American continent. It can only be ended by the victory of one system or the other.” Criticizing Lincoln’s early wavering on emancipation, Marx declared, “Events themselves drive to the promulgation of the decisive slogan—*emancipation of the slaves*.”

In the early stages of the war, Lincoln was fearful of the reaction of the four pro-Union slave border states as well as the Copperheads. The abolitionists and Radicals pushed Lincoln to grasp the need to smash slavery in order to win the war. Thaddeus Stevens declared: “It is plain that nothing approaching the present policy will subdue the rebels.”

In our article “Honor Abraham Lincoln!” (WVNo. 938, 5 June 2009 [reprinted in *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 22, July 2012]), which elaborates on the evolution of his views on race over the course of the Civil War, we stated:

“The American Civil War was a bourgeois revolution, and Lincoln was both bourgeois and revolutionary at the same time—with all the contradictions this implies.... Borrowing from today’s terminology, one could argue that Lincoln began as a reformist, believing that the reactionary social system in the South could be pressured into change and that the institution of slavery would eventually wither on the vine. But he underwent a radical shift when bloody experience in the crucible of war—combined with the mass flight of the slaves to the Union lines—taught him that the nation could be preserved only by means of social revolution.”

It is hard to say to whom the movie does more injustice, Lincoln or the abolitionists. Lincoln is turned into some Obama-style centrist, and the abolitionists into well-meaning people who couldn’t get the job done. Kushner in his interview with NPR condemned “impatience on the part of very good, very progressive people” as one of the main obstacles Obama faces today. In other words, like Obama, Lincoln’s virtue was that he knew that the way to get what is



Library of Congress

Soldiers of the 107th U.S. Colored Troops at Fort Corcoran, near Washington, D.C. Black soldiers were key to Union victory in the Civil War.

important is to give as well as take.

One of the most egregious aspects of the film is the lack of even a mention of Frederick Douglass, a powerful advocate for abolition and black rights. It was Douglass who not only urged Lincoln to recruit black troops, but advocated that they be treated fairly and paid the same as whites. Douglass had met and argued with Lincoln on a number of occasions, including at the reception after his second inaugural address, as Goodwin relates in the chapter of her book on the Thirteenth Amendment.

The one abolitionist who factors prominently in the movie is Thaddeus Stevens. Stevens has long been vilified, like many Radicals, as a vindictive fanatic who was likely mad. By portraying Stevens sympathetically, the movie hopefully will spur people to learn more about him and the other radical abolitionists.

Yet the film deals with Stevens one-sidedly. At one point in the movie, during a private conversation, Lincoln lectured Stevens that if matters had been left to the Radicals, emancipation would have failed: “But if I’d listened to you, I’d’ve declared every slave free the minute the first shell struck Fort Sumter; then the border states would’ve gone over to the Confederacy, the war would’ve been lost and the Union along with it, and instead of abolishing slavery, as we hope to do, in two weeks, we’d be watching helpless as infants as it spread from the American South into South America.”

There is a grain of truth to this since Lincoln the politician was mindful of public opinion and tried not to put him-

self too far ahead of it. But it leaves out how instrumental abolitionists like Stevens were in the fight against slavery. As Stevens’ biographer put it, “Thaddeus Stevens in the House and Charles Sumner in the Senate led the struggle against widespread apathy and fear, pushing through Congress the limited emancipation measures that prepared the nation for general emancipation and the Thirteenth Amendment” (Fawn M. Brodie, *Thaddeus Stevens: Scourge of the South*, 1959).

A telling example of how the movie tries to fit the abolition of slavery into the mold of compromise and bipartisanship is the dramatic tension over what Stevens would say in the House debate over the Thirteenth Amendment. Stevens was known for his saber-sharp sarcasm. In the movie, Ohio Congressman James Ashley—who sponsored the Amendment—begs Stevens to “compromise” in his advocacy of racial equality, “or you risk it all.” The movie then shows Stevens arguing with Fernando Wood on January 27, i.e., shortly before the final vote. In response to Wood’s badgering, Stevens states that he did not believe everybody was equal, but only should be treated equally before the law.

The drama of the scene is false, concocted in order to bolster the movie’s message of political conciliation. In fact, it was over three weeks before the voting when Stevens said that he advocated only “equality before the laws,” and he did so in response to Ohio Representative Samuel Cox, a Democrat who ended up voting for the Amendment. In any case, Stevens’ supposed “compromise”—civil rights for



Harper's Weekly

1868 election rally of freed black slaves in South during Reconstruction, most democratic period in U.S. history.

black people—was not only far ahead of most other politicians but also ahead of the actual Thirteenth Amendment.

Reconstruction

Several times in the movie, Lincoln declares that he was focused only on the task at hand—winning the war and abolishing slavery. He tells Stevens that he refuses to discuss Reconstruction after the war: “We shall oppose one another in the course of time. Now we’re working together.” Fair enough: one cannot fault a movie about Lincoln for not delving into what happened after the president’s assassination. But the movie’s refusal to even touch on what happened after the war serves a purpose. To do so would expose the folly of moderation and compromise with the pro-slavery forces.

After Vice President Andrew Johnson, a Democrat from the mountains of Tennessee, assumed the presidency following Lincoln’s death, remnants of the defeated Confederacy made it clear that, while their military defeat had forced them to accept the end of slavery, they had no intention of accepting black people as genuinely free. Southern states sent former Confederates to Congress and passed “black codes” that all but re-enslaved blacks. Meanwhile, Johnson carried out a policy of conciliating the South and was openly disdainful of black people.

Combating Johnson’s equivocal Reconstruction policy, Stevens and other Radical Republicans carried out what became known as Radical Reconstruction. Refusing to allow the Southern representatives

to sit in Congress, they passed laws—overriding Johnson’s repeated vetoes—that protected the rights of former slaves, extended the life of the Freedmen’s Bureau and politically disenfranchised the former slaveowners. The Union Army was stationed in the South to enforce these laws. Meanwhile, black people were asserting their basic rights by voting, standing for office and building schools. Radical Reconstruction was the most democratic period in American history, bringing advances for poor whites, such as public education, as well.

Among the Radicals in Congress, Stevens pushed to extend Reconstruction the furthest. He advocated black suffrage, disenfranchising former Confederates and, most radical of all, seizing the former slaveholders’ plantations and redistributing them to the freedmen. In the movie, Stevens articulates this vision, telling Lincoln: “We’ll build up a land down there of free men and free women and free children and freedom.” Since Johnson tried to subvert Reconstruction at every step, Stevens helped spearhead the drive to impeach him, which failed by one vote in Spring 1868.

One of Stevens’ last acts was to campaign for the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment. That Amendment extended the rights of citizenship to everybody born in the United States, regardless of race. While *Lincoln* implies that it was with the Thirteenth Amendment that Stevens compromised, it was in fact over the Fourteenth. He had pushed to give black men the right to vote, but the Amendment

instead reduced the number of representatives for states that denied blacks the right to vote. Stevens told Congress that he was going to vote for it “because I live among men and not among angels.” Only in 1870, with the Fifteenth Amendment, did black men gain the right to vote.

As we wrote in our 1966 document “Black and Red—Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom” (reprinted in *Marxist Bulletin* No. 9, “Basic Documents of the Spartacist League”): “Capitalist and slave alike stood to gain from the suppression of the planter aristocracy but beyond that had no further common interests.” In other words, even though a section of the bourgeoisie pushed to deepen Reconstruction, as a whole the ruling class had no such interest.

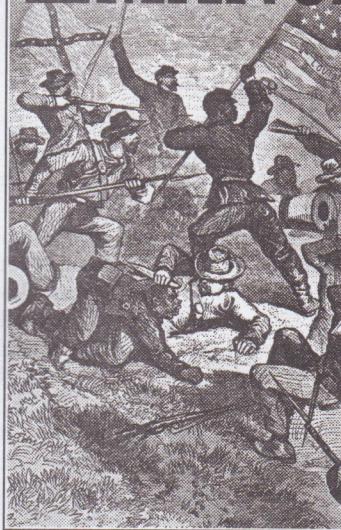
For Reconstruction to have succeeded would have required what Stevens advocated: breaking up the large landed estates and actually giving blacks “40 acres and a mule.” But the promise of black freedom was betrayed when the Northern capitalists formed an alliance with the remnants of the slavocracy in order to exploit Southern resources and the freedmen. Particularly following the Paris Commune of 1871, when the proletariat seized power for two months in the city, the American bourgeoisie saw expropriation and redistribution of private property in the land as a potential threat to themselves.

After the election of 1876, the last federal troops were recalled from the South as part of a compromise between the Republicans and the Democrats. Black freedmen and poor white sharecroppers didn’t have the social weight to defend their gains. With the racist Democrats returned to power in the South, they steadily stripped away the rights that black people had won. By the end of the century, the Southern states had disenfranchised black people and instituted formal Jim Crow segregation. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments would be dead letters until the civil rights movement of the 1950s and ’60s.

The defeat of Reconstruction was a betrayal of the promise of black equality. To this day, the Civil War remains unfinished business, with black people making up an oppressed race-color caste. They form an integral part of American society but at the same time are overwhelmingly segregated at its bottom. Although the Democrats are no longer the pro-slavery party they once were, they are no less foes of black liberation today, administering along with the Republicans the capitalist system in its death agony. The tasks of the Civil War can be finished only by smashing American capitalism through socialist revolution. ■

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150 YEARS SINCE THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION



Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper

The following is a presentation, edited for publication, by Spartacist League speaker Brian Manning at a 23 March 2013 New York City forum.

The Commander-in-Chief of bloody U.S. imperialism was inaugurated again a couple of months ago, and he cynically repeated the words of Abraham Lincoln and the Declaration of Independence—fine words about fighting for justice and equality. But Barack Obama is Commander-in-Chief of a capitalist system long into its imperialist epoch of decay. Today, racist U.S. imperialism continues to carry out what has been more than a century of pillage and war across the globe, brutally exploiting labor at home and abroad while qualitatively arresting wider social and economic development. The American capitalist rulers are the main enemy of the world's working people and oppressed, as the millions of dead bodies from Hiroshima to Korea to Vietnam to Iraq to Afghanistan silently attest.

In 1852 Frederick Douglass said, "There is not a nation on the earth guilty of prac-

Top: May 1863 Civil War battle at Port Hudson, Louisiana, one of first in which black Union troops fought. Inset: President Lincoln presents Emancipation Proclamation to his cabinet.

Finish the Civil War!

tices more shocking and bloody than are the people of the United States at this very hour." Substitute "ruling class" for "people" and it holds true today. But in the interim there was a great revolution in this country—the Second American Revolution. The Civil War was the last great, progressive act of the American bourgeoisie. To further the consolidation of industrial capitalism, at a time when the exploitation of free labor represented an historical advance, the North

was compelled to destroy the system of chattel slavery in the South. Slavery has been smashed, but the legacy of slavery, racial oppression, lives on.

The foundations of Obama's current residence and indeed the foundations of capitalist America were built by the labor of black slaves. The election of the first black president in history has done nothing and will do nothing to relieve the continuing nightmare of racial oppression for the mass of the black population. That oppression is structurally embedded in

American capitalism and will not be overcome short of socialist revolution.

Obama's liberal apologists, including those on the left who consider themselves socialists, like the International Socialist Organization (ISO) and Socialist Alternative, make excuses for Obama. They complain that Obama's hands are tied, that he can't do anything because if he does the right wing will say he was doing it for black people. Well, Obama's hands aren't tied! The hands of the working

class are tied, chained to the racist capitalist Democratic Party by trade-union misleaders who preach that the Democrats are the lesser evil. Obama likes to appeal for unity—one nation, one people. But this is a class-divided country—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. And the two classes have no common interests. In this capitalist country, the head of the government always represents the ruling class. Obama represents the system that is based on exploitation, oppression and war. The cynical sops he throws out are so much poisonous pabulum to fool the gullible or satisfy the sycophants.

With the release of the *Lincoln* movie, it was inevitable that there would be favorable comparisons of Lincoln and Obama. But we are talking apples and oranges. Abraham Lincoln was president

in a different epoch, when capitalism was historically progressive, when for a short time the interests of the nascent bourgeoisie coincided with the interests of black people in their fight against slavery and racist oppression, when the triumph of capitalism despite all the horrors inherent in that system of exploitation meant, as Abraham Lincoln put it, “a new birth of freedom.” Obama does not represent the culmination of the fight for black freedom but the effort of a retrograde system to preserve its barbaric rule by placing a black man at the helm.

One hundred and fifty years ago, when Lincoln was president, the capitalist system was different—not prettier, not benign, but compelled by history to eliminate a more backward economic system. The Union armies, black and white, began

the task of ending black oppression by burning out the system of slavery. But the task of achieving full equality for black people still remains. The special oppression born of slavery will be destroyed only through a class-struggle fight against that oppression and the system that perpetuates it—capitalism. We fight for the full integration of black people into an egalitarian socialist society—revolutionary integration. It is up to the multiracial working class, led by its most conscious elements forged together in a revolutionary vanguard party, to finish the job. That’s why we say: Finish the Civil War!

The Civil War: A Social Revolution

An antiquated social order does not cede its place to a new order without resistance—not today, not ever. A change in social regimes presupposes the harshest form of class struggle, i.e., revolution. The American Civil War was the most titanic and bloody of all social struggles during the 19th century. That struggle and the changes it wrought in the social and economic system, particularly in regard to the black population, set the stage for the American socialist revolution today. It was of decisive significance because the first American Revolution, in 1776, didn’t accomplish all of the tasks demanded of the bourgeoisie, specifically, national unification under a common political economy. It did not answer the question of who was to have political and economic supremacy: the slavocracy or the bourgeoisie. The first American Revolution was born of a compromise that gave the slavocracy an inordinate amount of power.

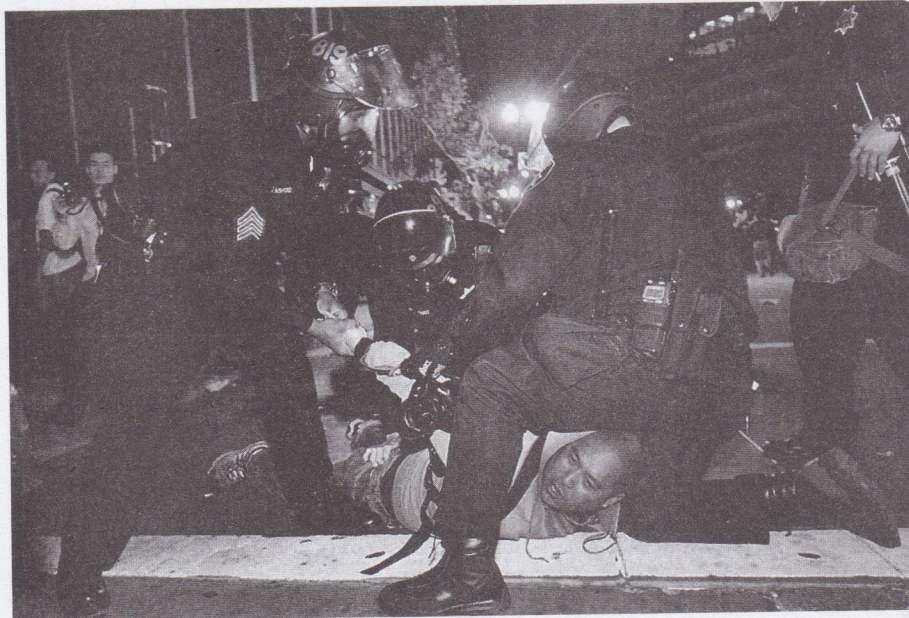
Compromise, that’s what the American system is all about, that’s how change comes about, right? The president of Emory University in Atlanta recently lauded the compromise that left black people enslaved and counted as three-fifths of a human being. But I bet the slave, shackled and whipped in perpetuity, didn’t think it was much of a compromise.

Despite pervasive racist attitudes among all social classes in the North, the compelling historic interests of Northern capital, expressed in the founding of the Republican Party as explicitly anti-slavery, led to a war against the southern slavocracy. The Radical program eventually became government policies. The armies of the Confederacy were defeated on the battlefields of the Civil War, and the political and economic power of the slaveowners’ oligarchy was shattered. The bourgeois dictatorship set up during the war was consolidated and the republic remodeled into conformity with the class aims and interests of the bourgeoisie. The way was



White House

Barack Obama, chief executive of racist U.S. capitalism, gesturing toward copy of Emancipation Proclamation in Oval Office, January 2010. Below: NYPD attack on protesters at 13 March 2013 Brooklyn vigil for Kimani Gray, black teenager killed by cops.



Reuters

paved for the exploitation of the North American continent and the world by American capital.

The North's victory was possible only through the emancipation of the millions of black chattel slaves and the arming of 200,000 of them in a war that destroyed the slave system. Today, the descendants of those slaves form a key component of the American proletariat, which will be the gravedigger of capitalism. The joint struggle of blacks and whites together has been a key motor force for social progress in this country, from the liberal-led civil rights movement that resulted in the end of *de jure* segregation to the massive class battles—many led by reds—that led to the formation of the integrated CIO unions.

In the 19th century, the Civil War and Reconstruction constituted the most far-reaching example of that joint struggle. The turbulent decade following the Civil War was one of interracial bourgeois democracy in the South, carried out by the freedmen and their white allies and protected by federal troops, many of them black. This period, known as Radical Reconstruction, was the most egalitarian experiment in U.S. history. A hundred and fifty years after the fact, the bourgeoisie wants to bury the truth about the Civil War. They would like to blot out any record of the fact that a social revolution occurred, that armies of black former slaves bloodily suppressed white racist armies. The bourgeoisie wants to paint an image of the war as a tragic conflict, a purely military affair, and to extol

the virtues of Lincoln the gifted and wily compromiser, the kindly Father Abraham who freed the slaves.

Because of the reality of black oppression today, people generally don't appreciate the significance of the Emancipation Proclamation. Black people today are no longer slaves, but neither are they free. The war and its results were a good thing. It was a social revolution in so far as labor is concerned. Slavery was destroyed. It is just unfortunate that it did not come sooner and that its job was not done more thoroughly.

The Northern bourgeoisie was reluctant to wage revolutionary warfare against the slavocracy, and afterward they made their peace with the Southern propertied classes and their minions at the expense of the emancipated blacks. The period after the destruction of the slave system was a period characterized by great fluidity in social relations, as the old social order had been destroyed. But the defeat of Reconstruction ensured the subordinate position of black people in American society. Black people were eventually consolidated into a race-color caste, integrated into the capitalist economy but forcibly segregated at the bottom of society. This was codified around the turn of the last century in the system known as Jim Crow.

The contours of society that emerged out of the Civil War and the defeat of Reconstruction—the economic system, the social relations, the political structure—are essentially the contours of American society that we know today. That's not to

say there haven't been some changes since then, for example, those resulting from the civil rights movement. But the basic lines are still the same.

The young working class did not enter the struggle against the slave power as a class on its own account, or with as much consciousness of its own aims as had been the case in the bourgeois revolutions in Europe in the 19th century. In the North, the white working class was the base of the slaveholders' Democratic Party. You know, it's nice to be able to denounce the Democrats here and not have people argue, "Oh, they're the lesser of two evils." Political parties cannot ignore their heritage. The Democrats were the party of slavery, the party of the White Leagues and the Redeemers, the party of the Dixiecrats. And now they're the party of Obama.

It was only when the Northern bourgeoisie conquered political power and remodeled the state according to its own wants that the inevitable conflict between labor and capital became imminent. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in Europe fought from the very beginning for the victory of the Union, the Northern bourgeoisie, in the Civil War. This was not because they were interested in a better, more just bourgeois society per se but because they wanted the working class to fight for socialist revolution, to seize power in its own name. They knew that it could not do so as long as slavery dominated and disfigured the country, stunting the development and consciousness of the proletariat.

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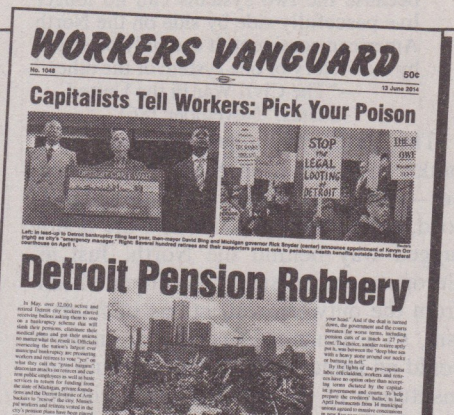
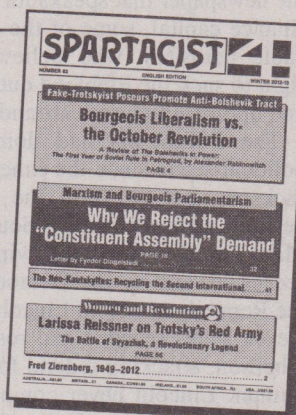
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As Marx wrote, "Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin, where in the black skin it is branded."

And the War Came

In 1860 the slaveowners said that the slave system was great. It had been in place on this continent for 250 years. But in 1865, four million black slaves had been freed in the course of a great Civil War. A key milestone was the Emancipation Proclamation, which was the death knell of slavery on the North American continent.

In this talk I want to focus in a little more detail on the summer and fall of 1862, on the various challenges that Abraham Lincoln had to confront when making his decision for emancipation. That's when the character of the war changed. Before the battle of Antietam in Maryland in September 1862 and the announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation in the wake of that Union victory, it was possible that a compromise settlement that left slavery intact could have been hammered out. Afterward, only a hard war was possible—a war of subjugation in which the slavocracy and its ability to wage war against the Union were destroyed.

As Marxists and historical materialists, we see the world in class terms. In 1860, the South had to expand or die. The question was who was going to be master of the North American continent. Marx wrote:

"The present struggle between the South and North is, therefore, nothing but a struggle between two social systems, the system of slavery and the system of free labour. The struggle has broken out because the two systems can no longer live peacefully side by side on the North American continent. It can only be ended by the victory of one system or the other."

—"The Civil War in the United States," November 1861

The slave system was increasingly a brake on material progress. By all indices—industrial production, miles of railroad, agricultural production—the South lagged way behind the North. Just as European capitalism had to liberate itself from the outworn restrictions of feudalism, so a dynamic American capitalism could no longer coexist with the outworn institution of slavery. Abraham Lincoln was elected on a program of no expansion of slavery. He could not have been elected on an abolition program. But even so, his program was not acceptable to the South.

Lincoln wanted to put slavery on a road to eventual extinction, and his favorite schemes were for gradual compensated emancipation and the colonization of black people outside of the country. The slavocracy, that thin layer of wealthy planters that ruled the South and the federal government for most of its existence up till then, still would have none of that.



Timothy O'Sullivan

Escaped slaves at Union Army lines in Virginia, 1862.

Lincoln was also inclined to denounce slavery as denying men and women the hard-earned fruits of their labor. He thought it was immoral for some to eat while others did all of the work. Lincoln and the Republicans extolled the virtues of the free labor system whereby everyone supposedly has a chance to improve their condition.

Now, there hasn't been much acknowledgement of the Emancipation Proclamation sesquicentennial. But the *Wall Street Journal* did notice, and what they focused on was that Lincoln believed in liberty of all kinds, beginning with economic freedom. That's rich coming from the newspaper that speaks for the lords of finance capital, some of the most despicable parasites, who believe it's their right to suck the lifeblood out of the poor and oppressed masses around the world.

The Democrats had dominated the political scene since the time of Andrew Jackson. But in 1860 the party split between a Northern and a Southern wing. Many in the Northern wing opposed secession, and so the Democrats lost to the Republicans. With Lincoln's election, eleven states seceded and rose in armed rebellion, attacking federal forces at Fort Sumter. Lincoln never compromised on the need to save the Union despite pressure to do so. But initially his war aims were limited to restoring the Union and bringing the Confederate states back into the Union as it had been. Lincoln wanted to draw in to that fight all the elements that wanted to save the Union. Hence, his conciliatory policies toward the border states and the War Democrats. He could not have mobilized for the war without the help of the War Democrats.

The Southern war aims were very explicit: to protect and defend slavery. The

Confederate vice president, Alexander Stephens, in a speech right after secession—the famous "cornerstone speech"—said that his new government's "foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not the equal to the white man; that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and moral condition." So even if the North was not fighting *against* slavery, the South was fighting *for* slavery.

Butler and the "Contrabands"

From the beginning, the abolitionists raised the call to turn the war into an abolition war. For years, through tireless and courageous agitation, the abolitionists had sought to bring the slavery question to the fore. There had been the prelude to the Civil War in "Bleeding Kansas," and John Brown and his integrated band had sent a lightning bolt through the nation with the Harpers Ferry raid in 1859. Now the chance to wage war against the slave power was here. The great black abolitionist Frederick Douglass wrote:

"Fire must be met with water, darkness with light, and war for the destruction of liberty must be met with war for the destruction of slavery.... *Let the slaves and free colored people be called into service, and formed into a liberating army, to march into the South and raise the banner of Emancipation among the slaves.*"

—"How to End the War,"
Douglass' Monthly (May 1861),
printed in *Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, Vol. 3

The slaves knew the stakes. They had their own agenda and immediately started coming into Union lines. Union commanders were wondering: "What do we do with these slaves coming into our lines?" The slaves had been doing work for the Confederates, raising food, of course, and working for the army as teamsters and

laborers. The Northern government had no consistent policy as to what to do about slaves and the slavery question, as yet. So, in May 1861, General George McClellan, who was a pro-slavery War Democrat in Virginia, told his armies to send the slaves back to their owners and be prepared to suppress slave insurrections.

On the other hand, Benjamin Butler—a political appointee and a lawyer from Massachusetts—was also a Democrat, but one who actually started changing when confronted with the problems of war. Butler came up with a new policy, the contraband policy. Also in Virginia in May 1861, three slaves who had been building Confederate fortifications came into Union lines. The next day, a Confederate colonel who had been their owner came in under a flag of truce and demanded his property back under the authority of the Fugitive Slave Law. Well, Butler told him no, they're contraband of war and we're keeping them. And he sent the colonel packing. That policy was eventually endorsed by the federal government.

So the slaves came into Union lines by the thousands, saying, "We're contrabands!" and the pressure to abolish slavery started rising. But Lincoln was not ready to act on the slavery question. In August 1861, General Frémont, who had been the 1856 candidate of the Republican Party, issued an order in Missouri freeing the slaves of rebels. His armies weren't faring too well and he needed some help. He was dealing with what would become a really brutal guerrilla war in Missouri. He issued an order which stated:

"All persons who shall be taken with arms in their hands within these lines shall be tried by court martial, and, if found guilty will be shot. The property, real and personal, of all persons in the State of Missouri, who shall take up arms against the United States...is declared to be confiscated to the public use, and their slaves, if any they have, are hereby declared free men."

—quoted in William Wells Brown, *The Negro in the American Rebellion* (1971)

Lincoln forced Frémont to revoke that order, and in December 1861 he fired his Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, who had been advocating emancipation. Granted, Cameron was truly corrupt and ineffective. Nevertheless, he was advocating emancipation. Lincoln ended up replacing Cameron with War Democrat Edwin Stanton, who turned out to be a great choice.

Not a whole lot was happening on the battle front. There were a few victories for the Union, notably by Ulysses S. Grant west of the Appalachians. Meanwhile, McClellan was training the Army of the Potomac in Virginia. Lincoln was pres-

suring him to act, but he just stayed with his huge army, camped around Washington, D.C., doing nothing but drilling.

Toward Emancipation

In the spring of 1862, neither side was closer to victory. Lincoln continued efforts at gradual, compensated emancipation. He begged the border states to embrace compensation, hinting to them that bigger changes might be coming down the pike if they did not embrace compensated emancipation. Lincoln also signed into law all measures passed by Congress proscribing slavery, including the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia and the federal territories.

For many soldiers, the experience of war was turning them against slavery. A volunteer from the Third Wisconsin Regiment wrote, "The rebellion is abolitionizing the whole army." In May 1862, General David Hunter, commanding the Department of the South, comprising South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, declared that slaves in his Department were forever free. Lincoln overturned that order, much to the chagrin of abolitionists, and said that if anyone were to act, it would be the president, not his generals. But Lincoln did not object to emancipation per se.

Hunter was operating from the Sea Islands, just off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. The slave masters had fled at the beginning of the war, when the Union Navy arrived. Hunter had been requesting reinforcements so he could carry on some work on the mainland but had not been able to get any from Washington. So he started arming the slaves on his own. The War Department got wind of this and wanted to know what Hunter was doing. He replied in a letter:

"No regiment of 'fugitive slaves' has been or is being organized in this department. There is, however, a fine regiment of persons whose late masters are 'fugitive rebels'.... They are now, working one and all, with remarkable industry to place themselves in a position to go in full and effective pursuit of their fugacious and traitorous proprietors."

—quoted in Dudley Cornish, *The Sable Arm* (1990)

Many of those first organized by Hunter later went on to be incorporated into the Union Army as the First and Second South Carolina Colored Troops.

Any momentum created by the Union victories at Fort Donelson and Shiloh was offset by the stalled Peninsula Campaign in Virginia in the spring and early summer of 1862, which culminated in a series of savage engagements known collectively as the Seven Days' Battles, fought between June 25 and July 1. George McClellan, leading the main Northern army, the



Mathew Brady

Edwin Stanton, Lincoln's Secretary of War.

Army of the Potomac, had been delaying, dilly-dallying all winter. Then, when forced into battle, he was overcautious, tentative and anxious to blame anyone—particularly Lincoln—for his own failures. He got to within a few miles of Richmond and then retreated. Two years later, Lincoln confided to artist Francis Carpenter that "I felt that we had reached the end of our rope on the plan of operations we had been pursuing; that we had about played our last card, and must change our tactics, or lose the game."

In mid June, Lincoln apparently first decided to issue an emancipation order, and he discussed this with his vice president, Hannibal Hamlin. Six months earlier, in December 1861, Lincoln said in his message to Congress: "The war continues. In considering the policy to be adopted for suppressing the insurrection I have been anxious and careful that the inevitable conflict for this purpose shall not degenerate into a violent and remorseless revolutionary struggle." But increasingly, the war was becoming exactly that on the slavery question and on the question of the destruction of the South's ability to make war. To bring this to fruition, Lincoln had to dance through a minefield: Pro-slavery generals who didn't want to fight to finish off the rebels, border state opposition to tampering with slavery, public opinion in the North, which was hardly universally abolitionist.

McClellan in the Way

On July 8, Lincoln's most powerful general, McClellan, gave him a letter. Really it was a political manifesto urging a conservative war policy and urging

Lincoln to abjure all thoughts of emancipation and put control of all military affairs into McClellan's hands. McClellan was a real piece of work. He had been placed in command the previous fall and had effectively reorganized and trained the army. He was totally full of himself, disdainful of Lincoln and angling for power. He surrounded himself with cronies all with the same view: keep things as they are, don't touch slavery.

But Congress and Lincoln had other ideas. On July 17, Congress passed the Second Confiscation Act, which allowed the seizure of rebel property, including slaves who would be emancipated. Although he signed it, Lincoln had his doubts, still. He actually wrote out a veto message that said, "The severest justice may not always be the best policy." Lincoln was not a consistent proponent of hard war, yet. At the same time, he wrote a letter to a Treasury official in New Orleans who complained that Union policy seemed headed toward emancipation. Lincoln wrote testily: "What would you do in my position? Would you drop the war where it is? Or would you prosecute it in future with elderstalk squirts charged with rosewater?"

On July 22, Lincoln presented a draft of the Emancipation Proclamation to his cabinet. Secretary of State William Seward suggested that Lincoln hold off issuing this preliminary proclamation until there was a Union victory. Otherwise, it might be viewed as an act of desperation on the part of the Union.

Lincoln acceded to this, but that victory did not come for another two months. You know, Lincoln was such a bundle of contradictions. As we wrote in our pamphlet *Black History and the Class Struggle* (No. 22): "The American Civil War was a bourgeois revolution, and Lincoln was both bourgeois and revolutionary at the same time. With all the contradictions this implies." Here's a good example. Lincoln had already determined that he was going to emancipate the slaves in August 1862, and so he met with black leaders that month at the White House to encourage them to embrace colonization. He argued that blacks should leave the country because "you and we are different races. Even when you cease to be slaves, you are yet far removed from being placed on an equality with the white race. But for your race among us, there could not be war. It is better for us both to be separated."

The black delegation was not impressed, and told him so. Black slaves had built the South, had supported themselves and their masters and created untold wealth for their masters besides. And the war had

Alexander Gardner

**Lincoln
confronts
General
McClellan
at site of
1862 Battle
of Antietam.**



raised the hopes of the black population. What little sentiment there had been for emigration before the war totally dissipated after the war began.

Then on August 17 Horace Greeley wrote in his *New York Tribune* "The Prayer of Twenty Millions Demanding Emancipation." Lincoln wrote his famous response:

"My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is *not* either to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave, I would do it. And if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that....

"I have here stated my purpose according to my view of *official* duty; and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed *personal* wish that all men everywhere could be free."

Lincoln was still worried about the border states. How would whites there react to an emancipation edict? Cassius Clay, a Kentucky radical Unionist after whom Muhammad Ali would later be named, told Lincoln to chill out: Anybody who's in a border state who wanted to fight for the Confederacy is already fighting for the Confederacy. Meanwhile, McClellan is sitting idly with his army. He said he was gratified to receive "letters from the North urging me to march on Washington and assume the government."

On August 30 there was another Union disaster: General Pope was defeated at the Second Battle of Bull Run. McClellan looked on gleefully as Pope's forces around D.C. were routed, holding his own forces back from coming to their relief.

He figured if Pope was defeated it could only further his own agenda. Pope had lost the confidence of his officers and the army. So Lincoln appointed McClellan to command all of the armies around D.C., over the strenuous objections of his cabinet. Secretary of War Stanton had passed around a statement calling for McClellan's removal, which almost all of the cabinet signed. Treasury Secretary Salmon Chase said that McClellan should be taken out and shot. But Lincoln didn't see an alternative. He kept McClellan as the top general, but he was a total wreck about it.

McClellan Removed

The summer of 1862 was the key turning point in the war. The strategies of both the North and the South had to change if *either* was to win a victory. At the end of August, the South launched a simultaneous invasion of two border states, Maryland and Kentucky, to "liberate" the supposedly pro-Confederate population from Yankee oppression. Lincoln and Confederate president Jeff Davis were not acting as the heads of stable national governments defending well-established constitutional systems but as leaders of embattled political movements whose regimes were vulnerable to the play of social and political forces they struggled to control.

Lincoln knew from the moment McClellan came to Washington in July 1861 to assume command of the Army of the Potomac that "Little Mac," as he was called, had incessantly schemed and conspired and politicked to try to gain

control of the administration. In August and September of 1862, Lincoln came to believe that McClellan was deliberately sabotaging the war effort and that the ideas being espoused at army headquarters were increasingly disloyal and treasonous. The capital was rife with rumors of plots and counterplots in the summer and fall. Colonel Thomas Key, who was on McClellan's staff, told a *New York Tribune* reporter that high officers in the Army of the Potomac were planning to "change front on Washington." McClellan's circle of confidants considered him to be the one man capable of saving the Union from both secession and radicalism, and the Army the only institution strong enough and loyal enough to control the administration.

Lee invaded Maryland and McClellan lucked out. He got a copy of Lee's order detailing the disposition of Confederate troops going into Maryland. So at Antietam the Union was able to thwart the Confederate invasion. But McClellan refused to go in for the kill, to destroy Lee's army. To his mind, that was not part of the plan.

Lincoln had not effected the strategic transformation he had envisioned in early July, the shift from a strategy of conciliation to a strategy of subjugation. That required the permanent sidelining of McClellan and the promulgation of the Emancipation Proclamation. But the victory at Antietam enabled Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, which he did in preliminary form on September 22. But it also aggrandized McClellan, who opposed emancipation and was willing to use his power to thwart Lincoln. Additionally, on September 24, Lincoln authorized the suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus* anywhere in the country, which allowed the arrest and detention of those accused of being Confederate agents or sympathizers and the suppression of newspapers for sedition.

It remained to be seen whether the military leadership was prepared to fight a war of subjugation, an emancipation war. Lincoln and his cabinet worried about how McClellan would respond. Lincoln did not publicly acknowledge the existence of the McClellan conspiracy; to do so would be to provoke a direct and dangerous confrontation between civil and military authorities. McClellan was either disloyal or incompetent, or both. So he had to go. But how to get rid of him, when he had just won the Battle of Antietam and public opinion was still in a tizzy over the issuance of the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation and the suspension of *habeas corpus*? And all this was on the eve of midterm elections. This was not the Korean War

of the 1950s, when the primacy of civil over military authority was already well-established. When General MacArthur objected to Harry Truman's war policies, Truman had a precedent for firing him. Plus, MacArthur was halfway around the world, not 70 miles from D.C.

Lincoln started weakening McClellan's position by exposing his flaws as a general, and McClellan had to decide what to do. He discussed it with his coterie in the army and prominent Democratic Party supporters who came to his camp up at Antietam, and even his pro-administration generals, all of whom advised him not to usurp civil authority. But McClellan did what he wanted. He issued an order to his army on the subject of the Emancipation Proclamation, carefully avoiding explicit opposition to the president but saying that the remedy for political errors, if any are committed, is to be found only in the action of the people at the polls, a clear challenge to the president. Furthermore, McClellan refused to move his army to attack Lee, again, despite direct orders. Lincoln waited until midterm elections were over (the Republicans got trounced, by the way) and removed McClellan from his generalship. McClellan accepted it passively.

A Manifesto Abolishing Slavery

A hundred days elapsed between the announcement of the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862, and when it was to take effect on January 1, 1863. Did the Army support the Emancipation Proclamation? A resounding "yes." The old vets in particular wanted to strike at the heart of the rebellion. And many in the North greeted it heartily, such as the abolitionists, the

Radicals. And Northern public opinion followed the Army's. Northerners were getting radicalized en masse as well.

The Emancipation Proclamation was an unprecedented assertion of presidential and federal power, altering forever the constitutional balance of powers. Congress had challenged Lincoln's authority to control war policy and military appointments, but now, with the stroke of a pen, \$3.5 billion worth of property was legally annihilated. In purely economic terms it approaches Henry VIII's seizure of church properties during the Reformation and the Bolsheviks' nationalization of the factories and farms after the Russian Revolution. The preliminary emancipation also stated of the freed slaves that the government "will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom."

Oh, the howls of protest! Echoing the concerns of the rebels, the *London Times* wrote that this was an incitement to servile insurrection. Well, the British ruling class was maybe a little paranoid. They had just finished putting down the 1857 Sepoy mutiny, the massive rebellion across the Indian subcontinent sparked by the Sepoys, who were the Indian soldiers in service to the British military. The abolitionist Senator Charles Sumner's nice riposte to this was that if servile insurrection happens, they're only getting what they deserve. But that phrase was taken out and replaced with an admonition to the freedmen "to abstain from all violence unless in necessary self defense."

This was still quite radical. That a slave could never raise his hand against the master was fundamental to slavery.

Frederick Douglass,
seated at center,
at anti-slavery
meeting in
New York State,
1850.

Madison County Historical Society

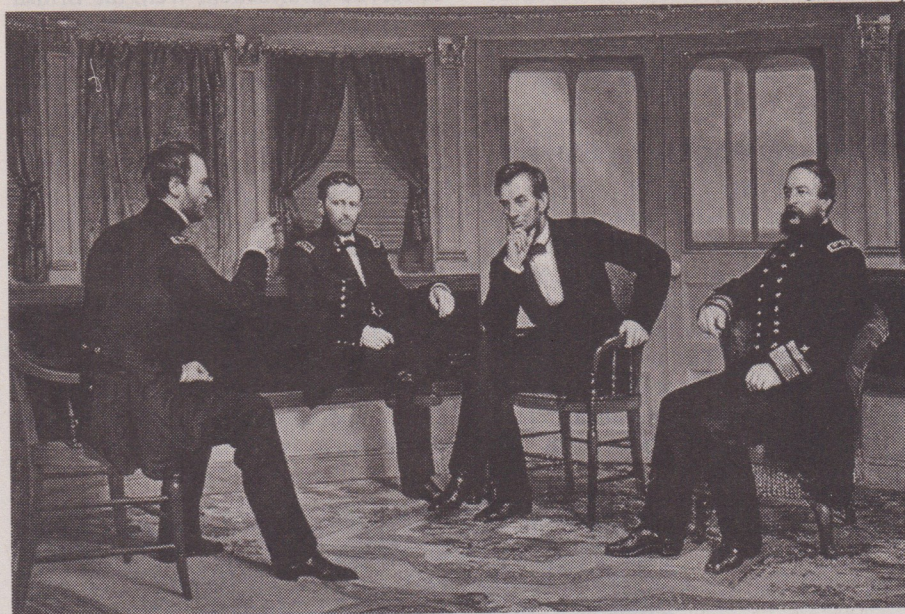




Henry P. Moore

Top: Slaves of Confederate general Thomas Drayton on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, being freed by Union forces, late 1861 or early 1862. Below: Painting of President Lincoln meeting with (left to right) Generals Sherman and Grant and Rear Admiral Porter, March 1865.

G.P.A. Healy



And then the preliminary emancipation stated that blacks "will be received into the armed service of the U.S." The abolitionists had been fighting for that since the beginning of the war. By extending the right to join in common defense through the use of federal power, it fundamentally altered the civil status of blacks in the North as well as the South, setting a precedent and stimulating a political movement for equal citizenship.

The preliminary decree had a call for continued colonization efforts. But by January 1, 1863, when he signed the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln changed his mind. The final proclamation was silent about colonization, and Lincoln would

never again mention it in public.

The Emancipation Proclamation was a pledge, a promise. It only freed slaves in areas that were not yet controlled by Union armies, true enough. But in that sense it was like the Declaration of Independence in 1776, which didn't make any of the colonies free—it took a victorious war to free the colonies from British rule. The Emancipation Proclamation bound the defense of the Union to the destruction of slavery. Given the rebel determination to defend slavery, the war could not be prosecuted as anything but a war of subjugation. Once the power of the government was enlisted on the side of freedom in one place, it couldn't be restricted in another.

Over three million slaves were affected by the Emancipation Proclamation; 830,000 were exempted, but nothing anywhere was untouched. Slaves in the exempted areas voted with their feet as well.

The Emancipation Proclamation did not sound like much; it was a pretty dry document. The abolitionists were disappointed because the proclamation was only issued on account of military necessity; they wanted some high-sounding phrases about advancing the cause of freedom. It was only because Salmon Chase said he should put something in there that Lincoln actually put in a sentence saying that it was sincerely believed to be an act of justice. Nevertheless, as Karl Marx wrote in *Comments on the North American Events* (October 1862): "The manifesto abolishing slavery, is the most important document in American history since the establishment of the Union, tantamount to the tearing up of the old American constitution." The only way the war could end was by the outright victory of one side over the other, and the victory of the North meant a revolutionary transformation of American society.

Since the beginning of the war there was a threat that Britain and France would enter on the side of the South. But once emancipation was proclaimed, Britain especially was unable to intervene. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and others organized support for the Union among workers in Britain, then the most powerful capitalist country in the world. They were quite successful, too, despite the desperate attempts of the ruling class to win the workers to the side of the slavocracy. British textile workers in particular exercised militant and heroic solidarity with their white and black brothers and sisters across the Atlantic. Impoverished to begin with, many endured years of unemployment due in part to the war. But they never wavered. Marx wrote:

"The English working class has won immortal historical honour for itself by thwarting the repeated attempts of the ruling classes to intervene on behalf of the American slaveholders by its enthusiastic mass meetings, even though the prolongation of the American Civil War subjects a million English workers to the most fearful sufferings and privations."

—*Proclamation on Poland by the German Workers' Educational Society in London* (October 1863)

Who Freed the Slaves?

Lincoln both led and responded to a transformation in public sentiment. He was later quoted as saying, "It is my conviction that, had the proclamation been issued even six months earlier than it was, public sentiment would not have sustained it." The same was true with enlist-

ing black men. He said, "The step taken sooner could not, in my judgment, have been carried out." So was Lincoln too slow in proclaiming emancipation, turning the Civil War into an abolition war? Well, fast and slow are relative terms. Perhaps he agonized too long on the border states. Perhaps he fretted too long about the Northern Democrats. But by the standards of the American people as a whole, Lincoln's pace was radical and swift.

The bulk of the Northern populace, and particularly white soldiers, came to see the need to fight for black freedom. The soldiers came to that understanding much sooner. That's not to say that the Army was free from prejudice, far from it. But especially once blacks proved themselves in battle, they earned the respect of their white comrades-in-arms.

Of course, there was opposition to the Emancipation Proclamation from the Democrats, the most rabid of whom were known as Copperheads, after the poisonous snake. The antiwar Democrats escalated racist hysteria among workers and immigrants, with Democratic politicians and newspapers declaring that the freed slaves would steal the jobs of white workers. We've heard that before, haven't we? I mean, the ruling class is whipping up that same hysteria over immigrant workers today. Then in 1863 the anti-draft riots in New York City turned into a racist pogrom. In 1864, during a period of defeat and demoralization in the North in the lead-up to the elections, the Democrats fomented racist opposition to emancipation. They actually coined the word miscegenation and published material replete with lurid racist cartoons. McClellan was the Democrats' presidential candidate in 1864.

Starting in the 1960s and 1970s, many in the black nationalist movement and the New Left questioned Abraham Lincoln's role: Did he free the slaves? The short answer is yes, because without a Civil War victory there would be no emancipation. And Lincoln was the primary architect of that victory. Lincoln has also been slandered as a racist by, for example, the historian Lerone Bennett and the so-called Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP). The RCP has a sordid history in the fight against black oppression anyway, most notoriously in Boston during the 1974 busing crisis when they sided with white racists against the fight for integration. Lincoln was not a racist—the racists were the ones Lincoln was fighting against.

And then there is the Spark organization. They're agnostic on the Civil War. They say it was a civil war in the South against Yankee capitalist oppression and

they have no problem with the Confederate flag. Progressive Labor (PL), similarly, ignores the centrality of the fight against slavery. Even worse, PL lauds the New York City draft riots without mentioning slavery.

They all imbibe the racist myth, born out of the defeat of Reconstruction and perpetuated by generations of historians and defenders of the Confederacy, that the Civil War was *not* about slavery. Lincoln changed and the aims of the war changed. The Abraham Lincoln who said he was against "remorseless revolutionary struggle" in 1861 is not the same Lincoln who, at his second inaugural in 1865, said:

"Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's 250 years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said 3,000 years ago, so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether'."

But we are not uncritical of Lincoln. I would like to quote Frederick Douglass from a speech he delivered in April 1876 at the dedication of the freedmen's memorial to Abraham Lincoln in Washington, D.C. You had all the luminaries of the Republican Party there: President Ulysses S. Grant, Salmon Chase, who was at this point chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. And Frederick Douglass says:

"Abraham Lincoln was not, in the fullest sense of the word, either our man or our model. In his interests, in his associations, in his habits of thought, and in his prejudices, he was a white man....

"Abraham Lincoln saved for you a country, he delivered us from a bondage, according to Jefferson, one hour of which was worse than ages of the oppression your fathers rose in rebellion to oppose....

"Abraham Lincoln was at the head of a great movement, and was in living and earnest sympathy with that movement, which, in the nature of things, must go on until slavery should be utterly and forever abolished in the United States."

—*The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, Vol. 4

The Role of Black Troops

A key provision of the Emancipation Proclamation was the arming of the slaves. Black troops played a critical role in the Union victory. With the recruitment of regiments of former slaves against their former masters, it was clear that a revolution was in progress. The Black Spartacus was on the march! It was very demoralizing to the slaveholders.

But it was a question: Would the former slaves fight? Would they be good soldiers? Many doubted that after the



Illustrated London News

1863: Anti-draft riots in New York City became a racist pogrom.

degradation of slavery blacks could be good soldiers and not just humble, subservient, oppressed people. But the heroic Massachusetts 54th Regiment decisively settled that question when they charged into the guns of Fort Wagner, South Carolina, incurring massive casualties. Black soldiers became some of the best fighters for the Union, fighting for freedom, fighting for the freedom of their families, fighting with nooses around their necks. They were sent back into slavery if they were captured and their white officers faced execution if they were captured.

If black soldiers surrendered, the Confederates often massacred them. One of the worst examples was at Fort Pillow, Tennessee, a federal garrison composed of black regiments and white regiments. When the garrison surrendered after being attacked by the cavalry of Nathan Bedford Forrest, scores of black soldiers were massacred. Forrest was a slave trader before the war, a dealer in convict labor after the war, and he was a founder of the KKK. But after the massacre, black soldiers seldom surrendered. When they went into battle, they would fight like hellcats, with a battle cry on their lips: "Remember Fort Pillow!"

The 54th was a great black regiment. But there were not a whole lot of blacks in the North where the 54th was recruited. So Lincoln and Secretary of War Stanton sent Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas to the Mississippi Valley to recruit black soldiers and dispel the opposition of white soldiers. I like to use Lorenzo Thomas as an example of how people change during a revolution. Thomas was a 60-year-old

paper-pusher, a bureaucrat in Washington, D.C., for years and years. He had not seen the field of battle for ages. But he got sent to the Mississippi Valley to recruit black soldiers, and he did it. He would go from camp to camp and make speeches to the white soldiers. What he would say to them about the black people coming into the lines was to "receive them kindly and cordially. They are to be encouraged to come to us; they are to be received with open arms; they are to be fed and clothed; they are to be armed." He was instrumental in recruiting 100,000 black soldiers. Two hundred thousand black soldiers were recruited, all told.

Also illustrative of the contradictions of this bourgeois revolution is William Tecumseh Sherman, who was a stone racist. He sabotaged the effort to recruit black troops to the point of insubordination, all the while dealing some of the deadliest military blows to the Confederacy. He refused to allow the recruitment of black troops near his armies because he wanted blacks only as laborers. Lincoln tolerated this because Sherman could win battles. With his march to the sea and then up through South Carolina, Sherman did more than any other Union general to burn the heart out of slavery. Sherman epitomized the hard war that Lincoln and Grant had pushed.

It's not about the ideas in people's heads but what they do. As materialists, we understand that social being determines social consciousness—that is, most people can only transcend their own history to a limited degree. So banish moralism and focus on the act! I'm sure the modern-day fans of the Confederacy don't

care very much what Sherman thought. But they sure can't forget what he did!

The Dawn of Reconstruction

Bourgeois mythology would have it that it was a straight shot from the Emancipation Proclamation to Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement to Obama. No! The *Chicago Tribune* (3 February) had a little piece on the Emancipation Proclamation headlined: "Lincoln's Proclamation Inspired Slaves to Leave Plantations, Embrace Hope." Embrace hope? Please! Where have we heard that before? Obama's campaign literature, of course. It conjures up images of tear-stained black faces turning their eyes to the sky, when the reality was war and revolution!

At the end of the war, emancipated slaves, many with guns in their hands, were at the very center of the Second American Revolution, pushing ahead, without organization, toward the redistribution of land and toward political liberty. These measures necessitated turning the entire structure of the old South upside down. The confiscation of the land owned by the big proprietors and its partition and distribution among the landless laborers meant an agrarian revolution. The triumphant capitalists wanted to perpetuate their grip upon the national government, increase their control over industry and agriculture and grab natural resources. In order to promote this program, their political representatives had to maneuver with other forces in the country.

What started out at the close of the Civil War as an alliance between the Northern capitalists and the black and white plebeians of the South against the landed aris-

toocracy terminated in 1876 with a union between the capitalist magnates and the planters against the Southern masses, particularly the black freedmen. In 1865, aside from the military and the Freedmen's Bureau, which had been established by the federal government, there was no government in the South. Everything was up in the air. The 13th Amendment was on the books, but little else was settled.

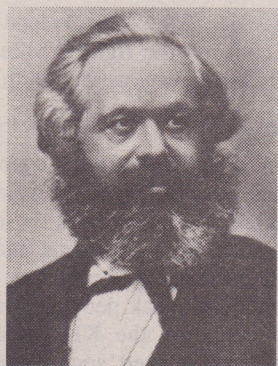
There were several hundred thousand black people either in the Army or recently demobilized. They felt it was time to cash in on what was due them. Perhaps the most idealized version of what black people thought Reconstruction was supposed to turn into was "40 acres and a mule." This comes from Sherman's Special Order No. 15, which he issued in Savannah in 1865, right after he finished his march through Georgia. That order gave 40 acres of abandoned land and also unneeded old Army mules to newly freed black families.

The way this happened is that Secretary of War Stanton had come down to visit Sherman's army in Savannah. He and Sherman met with black preachers from the area. Sherman was very well known for his hot temper. I can see him just seething, having to sit down with all these black preachers and talk with them man to man. But out of that meeting came the Special Orders. This relieved Sherman of the problem of what to do with the thousands of former slaves who had followed in his train. Then Stanton ordered Sherman to add a black regiment to his army, which he did, except that regiment was abused all the way from Georgia up through South Carolina. I

F.O.C. Darley

Engraving depicts General Sherman's 1864 march to the sea, which cut the heart out of Confederacy.





Police attack workers meeting in London's Hyde Park, 1862. Karl Marx (inset) helped organize solidarity by English workers with Union war against slaveholders.

Progress (inset); Dietz Verlag Berlin



told you that Sherman was hardly a racial egalitarian. Yet and still, despite his subjective beliefs, Sherman was caught up in a revolution. And he wrote that Order, which put land into the hands of black freedmen and helped to inspire the fight for black freedom.

Radical Reconstruction

In the summer of 1865, the redistribution of abandoned and confiscated land was Freedmen's Bureau policy, supported by the military. But it was very quickly turned around. Many Southern states passed Black Codes. This was slavery in everything but name—vagrancy laws, forced apprenticeships, forced contracts—to regulate and control black labor. The precedent for Black Codes was set in the North where, despite the abolition of slavery prior to the Civil War, there were many legal proscriptions against black people. But the Black Codes were not rigorously or uniformly enforced, unlike the Jim Crow laws that came later. Things were still volatile and were so much up in the air, with lots of victorious black soldiers with guns roaming around.

Let me note the importance of the right to bear arms, and how important that has always been for the defense of black rights. The right of self-defense was key. We say, "Gun control kills blacks." Obama and a whole section of the ruling class are bemoaning gun violence. But the whole history of gun control in this

country is the story of the ruling class trying to disarm the population, particularly in periods of social struggle. Hence the reactionary Black Codes passed in various Southern states tried to outlaw the possession of firearms by black people. In response, the Freedmen's Bureau widely distributed circulars that read in part: "All men, without distinction of color, have the right to keep and bear arms to defend their homes, families or themselves."

Every gain that black people have made was a battle. In a letter to Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson, on behalf of the First International, Marx wrote: "Yours, Sir, has become the task to uproot by the law what has been felled by the sword, to preside over the arduous work of political reconstruction and social regeneration." But Johnson did exactly the opposite. He tried to restore the old social order in everything but name. Johnson started amnestying former slaveowners and weeded radicals out of the Freedmen's Bureau. Johnson had an all-consuming hatred of black people. He was a former slaveowner with the mentality of poor white trash, a racist appeaser of remnants of the slavocracy. Johnson was really fearful of a link-up of black and white poor. The idea of real social and political equality repelled him. Johnson's amnesty proclamations were an abrogation of Sherman's Field Order No. 15. Forty thousand freedmen were deprived of 485,000 acres of land.

The hallmark of any revolution is the independent mobilization of the masses in defense of their rights and aspirations. That occurred all over the South, with committees, councils and armed self-defense groups springing up. Could black people, arms in hand, have seized the land? In some cases they did. But they were mostly forced off the land. Thaddeus Stevens, probably the most consistent American Jacobin, recognized that land was the key. By being landholders, black freedmen would have an economic basis to defend their rights instead of being beholden to the landlords. Most others, including Frederick Douglass, focused more on the right to vote.

The bourgeoisie was horrified by the thought of confiscation. The free-soil ideology meant that through thrift and hard work you could own a little shop or a farm. As if 250 years of unrequited toil didn't count. The bourgeoisie was quite class-conscious. It paid close attention to the restive working class in Europe, where, in 1871, the French proletariat seized power in Paris and held it for some months—the Paris Commune. The American bourgeoisie recoiled from that. The *New York Times*, then as now a mouthpiece for that class, wrote: "An attempt to justify the confiscation of Southern land under the pretense of doing justice to the freedmen, strikes at the root of all property rights in both sections. It concerns Massachusetts quite as much as Mississippi."

During Johnson's presidency, blacks were beaten and shot down by the hundreds. Black people were no longer anybody's property, so life was cheap. The slaughter of black and white Republicans

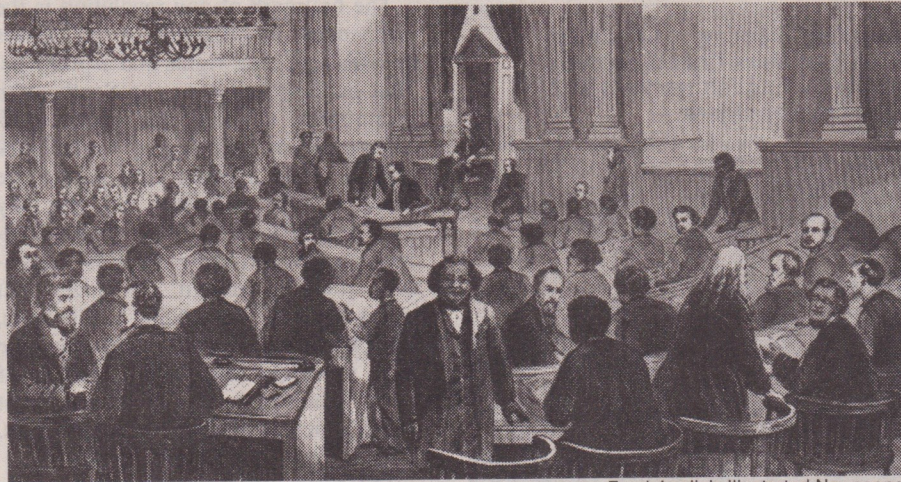
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Thomas Nast

Above: Under Radical Reconstruction, Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1867-68 included two dozen black delegates, provided universal male suffrage. Left: 1876 drawing depicts racist terror by paramilitary White League aimed at reversing gains made by black freedmen.

led directly to military Reconstruction. Many in the North started to be alarmed. They had just finished a brutal civil war and did not want the slaveholders back in power. There was a polarization. The moderates were driven into the arms of the Radicals. The *Chicago Tribune*, hardly known today as a radical journal, wrote that the North would convert Mississippi "into a frog pond" before allowing slavery to be reestablished.

The Radicals got the majority of support in Congress and began to set the tone of Reconstruction. The South was placed under military control by Congress. As General-in-Chief, U.S. Grant appointed the generals running each district. Grant was allied with the Radicals on many issues and was generally sympathetic to the struggles of black people, even if like Lincoln he did not personally believe in social equality. During his presidency, starting in 1868, his policy was a real mixed bag.

It took a battle to preserve black rights. There were the Freedmen's Bureau, the Union Leagues, black militias. But federal troops were the key. Reconstruction

could not have succeeded as much as it did absent even a halfhearted commitment to smash and crush forces of reaction by the federal government. Congress wanted to readmit the former Confederate states to the Union. But the only way these states could be admitted was on the Union's terms. And the only way those terms would be met was if black people got the vote. Under military Reconstruction, with the passage of the Reconstruction Acts and the 14th Amendment, blacks were given the vote and elected to state constitutional conventions and Reconstruction governments.

Once black people gained the franchise, the Republicans dominated Reconstruction governments across the South. The majority of officeholders were white with a significant minority of blacks, based on the support of blacks and some poor whites. Black Republicans became the major focus for political, social and economic justice in the South. They agitated for more political rights, more schools, more hospitals, more land, more debtors' relief—things that benefitted the vast majority of Southern labor, black and

white. The passage of the 15th Amendment in 1870 codified the right to vote, all across the North as well as the South.

Racist Reaction

But Northern capitalists had other interests: profit. They were willing to invest in the capital-starved South, but when those profits were threatened by agitation and unrest, they pulled the plug. Reconstruction governments and black people were always under attack by the KKK and similar groups that wanted social and economic control of the black population. Black schools were particularly a target, and scores went up in flames. Intimidation and murder were rampant. Congress adopted all sorts of paper measures protecting blacks, including the 14th Amendment that guarantees "equal protection of the laws." But the government betrayed the promise of black liberation in the Compromise of 1877, when almost all the remaining Union troops were withdrawn from the South. Reconstruction was defeated by blood and fire.

The post-Reconstruction period, called Redemption by the racists, was marked by a political counterrevolution aimed at black people and enforced by racist terrorists. A new system of racist exploitation was established by restricting the rights of freedmen across the board. In 1896, the Supreme Court codified "separate but equal" segregation as the law of the land in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Segregation took the place of chattel slavery as the main prop of the new racist order. This rigid system of legally enforced racial segregation, called Jim Crow, was imposed and maintained by police-state repression and the terror of the KKK which, in the words of Civil War historian James McPherson, "became in effect armed auxiliaries of the Democratic party." It took a long and often bloody struggle for the civil rights movement 80 years later to restore some of the rights black people won during the Civil War and Reconstruction.

With the triumph of capitalism across the continent also came the creation of the class destined to become the gravediggers of that same system, the working class. Once freed from the retarding effects of the slavery question, the labor movement took off with agitation for the eight-hour day, agitation for unions. This culminated in the Great Rail Strike of 1877, which was brutally suppressed by the Army that was no longer defending black people in the South. However, concomitant with the entrance of the American bourgeoisie onto the world stage as an imperialist power in the 1890s, there developed a layer of hardcore trade-union bureaucrats bought off by the spoils of imperialism



WV Photo



Washington Post

Left: Spartacist supporter dressed in Union Army uniform tears down Confederate flag of slavery at San Francisco Civic Center, April 1984. Right: Labor/black mobilization organized by Spartacist League stopped Klan from marching in Washington, D.C., November 1982.

and sharing the values of the ruling class. They imported and continued to import this retrograde consciousness into the working class.

Now I would like to acknowledge the debt we owe to Dick Fraser, a leading member of the Socialist Workers Party in the 1940s and '50s, when it was still a revolutionary organization. Fraser developed a trenchant Marxist analysis of slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction, of the origins of the racist system in

this country and the material basis for black oppression. Fraser wrote: "After the Civil War and Reconstruction destroyed the old slave owning class, northern capital, from economic and political motives, betrayed its promises and created a revised, capitalist form of race relations, based upon many of the traditions and social relations of slavery" ("Revolutionary Integration: the Dialectics of Black Liberation," *Revolutionary Age*, Vol. 1, No. 1 [1968]).

Fraser took as a starting point the lessons he had learned from studies of the 1917 Russian Revolution, particularly Bolshevik Party policies on the many nationalities in Russia. And that is the point on which I want to conclude—the Bolshevik Revolution. The Bolsheviks united the struggles of all the oppressed behind the banner of the working class, and that is what we must do. Today, we take up struggles for immigrant rights, for women's rights, and we fight to replace the trade-union misleaders with a militant, class-struggle leadership.

We wrote in one of our basic documents, "Black and Red," in 1967:

"Only common struggle for common aims can unite the working class and overcome the lifelong racial prejudices of American workers. A victory of the socialist revolution in this country will be achieved through the united struggle of black and white workers under the leadership of the revolutionary vanguard party. In the course of this struggle, unbreakable bonds will be forged between the two sections of the working class. The success of this struggle will place the Negro people in a position to insure at last the end of slavery, racism and super-exploitation."

The forcible segregation of black people, integral to American capitalism, has been resisted by the black masses whenever a perceived possibility for such struggle has been felt. The entire history of mass black struggle—from the abolitionists through the Civil War and Radical Reconstruction to the civil rights movement—has been in the direction of integration, not separation.

While combating every manifestation of racist oppression, fighting in particular to mobilize the social power of the multi-racial labor movement, we underline that full equality for the black masses requires that the working class rip the economy out of the hands of the racist capitalist rulers and reorganize it on a socialist basis. Only then will it be possible to eliminate the material roots of black oppression through the full integration of black people into an egalitarian socialist society based on a collective economy with quality jobs, housing, health care and education for all. You see, it was the Russian working class led by the Bolsheviks who carried out the first and thus far only successful socialist revolution. We aim to build a vanguard party that will fight for the next one.

In the midst of the Second American Revolution, Lincoln said in the Gettysburg Address, "It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced." Well, there is still a lot of unfinished work. Join us in the fight for a Third American Revolution. Join us in the fight to build a revolutionary party. Finish the Civil War—For black liberation through socialist revolution! ■

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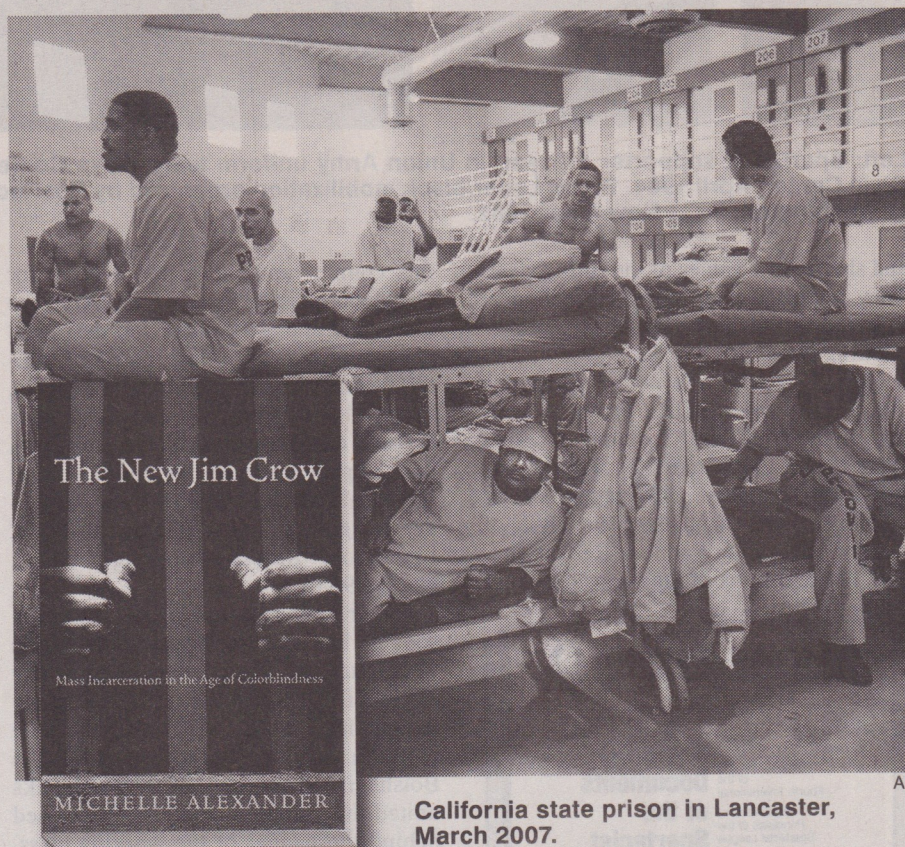
The New Jim Crow and Liberal Reformism

Mass Incarceration and Black Oppression in America

Over 40 years ago, Black Panther militant George Jackson wrote in a letter from a California prison: “Blackmen born in the U.S. and fortunate enough to live past the age of eighteen are conditioned to accept the inevitability of prison. For most of us, it simply looms as the next phase in a sequence of humiliations” (*Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*, 1970). Since then, incarceration on a scale unexampled in the annals of American history has taken root, with black men by far the largest group in the prisons and jails, which hold some 2.3 million people. Many are victims of the bipartisan “war on drugs,” which has fueled a vast expansion of both police powers and the prison population. Taken together, the total of those locked up or on parole or probation is greater than the population of any U.S. city other than New York.

Over the past year, prisoners from California to North Carolina have engaged in hunger strikes against the appalling conditions in America’s overcrowded dungeons, fighting to wrest some vestige of humanity from their jailers. Eventual release is not the end of the abuse, as basic constitutional rights, including the right to vote and to bear arms, are stripped away and one door after another is slammed shut—jobs, public housing, social services—except the one leading back inside prison walls. In addition to the threat of incarceration, black youth daily face harassment and brutalization at the hands of the cops. In 2011 alone, nearly 700,000 people, 87 percent of them black or Latino, were victimized by the New York Police Department’s “stop and frisk” offensive. Tens of thousands in NYC have been saddled with criminal records for simply possessing small amounts of marijuana.

By vividly depicting the devastating “collateral consequences” of the caging of black America, Michelle Alexander’s 2010 book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*



California state prison in Lancaster, March 2007.

has tapped into deeply felt anger at the shattered lives and become a bestseller. A liberal civil rights lawyer, Alexander writes that she has been newly awakened to “the role of the criminal justice system in creating and perpetuating racial hierarchy in the United States.” Acknowledging that she is a part of a thin layer of more privileged blacks who benefited most from the civil rights movement, Alexander to her credit argues strongly against the prevalent disdain for the impoverished ghetto masses among blacks of her social standing.

The New Jim Crow also cuts against the myth that the U.S. has become a “color-blind” society, a central theme of the 2008 Obama campaign. Indeed, for “post-racial”

liberals, his capturing the White House was proof positive of the dawning of a new era, never mind the cop terror and prison hell, unemployment, home foreclosures, desperate ghettos and prison-like inner-city schools that define life for masses of black people in capitalist America, now with its black overseer. Despite expressing some disappointment in the current administration, Alexander clings to the message of “hope,” titling one section of her book “Obama—the Promise and the Peril.”

Alexander details the racist backlash to the struggles of the civil rights movement, which resulted in the end of the Jim Crow system of legal segregation in the South. Taking the place of naked white suprem-



Arthur Rothstein

Evicted sharecroppers along Highway 60, Missouri, 1939.

acy were racist government policies, such as the 1970s “war on crime” and the subsequent “war on drugs,” which were sold to the population in coded language. She also makes a connection between black people being “trapped in jobless ghettos” and being “hauled off to prison in droves.” But while Alexander provides effective and compelling anecdotes and statistics detailing the second-class status of the millions ensnared in the prison system—what she calls the “New Jim Crow”—her wet noodle of a prescription is “movement building” to pressure the government for reform.

This liberal strategy has time and again misled those who seek to fight the evils of the racist capitalist system into reliance on the very government and political parties that oversee that system. Not surprisingly, Alexander’s approach is echoed by the reformist International Socialist Organization (ISO) and other left groups that have embraced her as their latest muse. In *Socialist Worker* (19 October 2011), the ISO crowds that its Campaign to End the New Jim Crow coalition will push for “a fundamental shift from a punitive model to a healing and transformative model of justice.”

We await the ISO’s prediction of when pigs will fly. Organized violence in furtherance of the rule and profits of the bourgeoisie is the very purpose of the state machinery—the cops, courts, prisons and military. The ISO’s shameless sowing of illusions to the contrary is a measure of the fidelity of these “socialists” to the capitalist order. For her part, Alexander asserts that over the last three decades “the nature of the criminal justice system has changed.” Not at all.

The simple truth is that the mills of capitalist “justice” will continue, as always, to grind out victims for the penitentiary from among the castoffs of a system rooted in exploitation and racial oppression, and that the state will use its repressive force—including deadly force—against those victims. As Marxists, we support struggles for whatever reforms can be wrested from the capitalist rulers, including not least the fight to abolish the racist death penalty. But justice will be done only when the capitalist order—with its barbaric state institutions—is shattered by a proletarian socialist revolution that establishes a planned economy with jobs and quality, integrated housing and education for all, thus smashing the basis for black oppression.

The Perpetuation of Caste Oppression

The ISO brags that its Campaign to End the New Jim Crow will jump-start a “movement that challenges the racist ideologies which have helped produced [sic] these conditions.” But black oppression is not the product of bad ideas. It is *materially rooted* in and central to American capitalism, which was built off the blood and sweat of black labor, from chattel slavery to the assembly line.

The enduring color bar has proved invaluable to the capitalist masters in dividing workers and weakening their struggles against the bosses. It has also served to retard the political consciousness of the American proletariat by obscuring the irreconcilable *class* divide between labor—white, black and immigrant—and its exploiters.

Originally, the myth of an inferior race

was created to ensure a stable, self-reproducing supply of labor on the Southern plantations, where slavery was the central productive relationship. The “markers” of African descent were used to transform blacks into a permanent and perpetually vulnerable group relegated to subordinate status based on their skin color.

The Civil War smashed the slavocracy. But the promise of black equality was soon betrayed as the Northern bourgeoisie, driven by its profit motive, reconciled with the former slaveowners. The Compromise of 1877, under which the last Union troops were withdrawn from the South, brought a close to Radical Reconstruction, the most democratic period ever for black people in the U.S. There would be no “40 acres and a mule” for the emancipated slaves, who were driven back onto the land as sharecroppers and tenant farmers.

As the U.S. developed into an emerging imperialist power, the Jim Crow system was codified throughout the South, leaving its imprint on the rest of the country as well. When blacks escaped their miserable conditions in the South, which were enforced by police-state control and Ku Klux Klan terror, by flocking to Northern industrial cities, they became a crucial part of the proletariat. At the same time, they faced all-sided segregation and discrimination, backed up no less by the state’s repressive apparatus.

The legacy of the defeat of Reconstruction is that the black population in the U.S., although not returned to slavery, was solidified as a *specialty oppressed race-color caste*. To this day, black people face discrimination, in different degrees, regardless of social status, wealth or class position. The caste oppression of black people is shown not just by the mass incarceration of ghetto youth. For example, even Henry Louis Gates Jr., although a noted professor and personal friend of Obama, was arrested for trying to enter his own house three years ago.

Our Marxist understanding of race-caste oppression flows from the fact that black people have historically been a vital part of the American economy while at the same time in the mass forcibly segregated at the bottom. The Spartacist League advances the program of revolutionary integrationism: Fighting against all forms of discrimination and segregation, we understand that the liberation of black people can be achieved only through integration into an egalitarian socialist society. This Marxist perspective is counterposed to both liberal integrationism, which holds that black equality can be achieved within the confines of

American capitalism, and black nationalism, which despairs of the possibility of overcoming racial divisions through united class struggle.

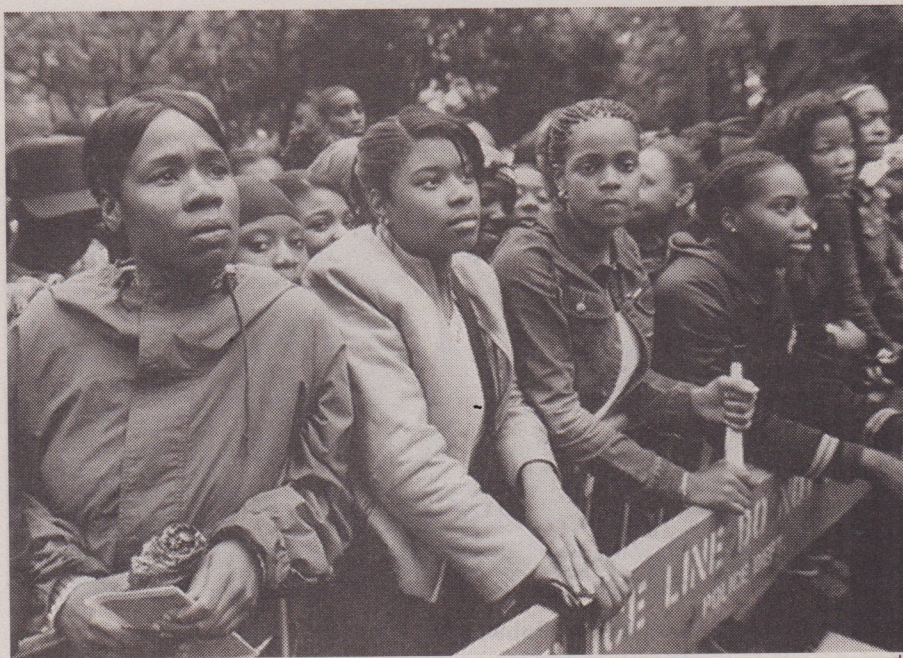
The Civil Rights Movement and Its Demise

The anti-Marxist ISO seems to have discovered “racial caste” since reading *The New Jim Crow*, headlining its review of the book in *International Socialist Review* (September-October 2010) “How the Racial Caste System Got Restored.” But for the ISO, and Alexander, the term caste is reserved for those directly subjugated by a particular “system of control”—identified today as simply mass incarceration—that can be eradicated within the framework of capitalism. This turns the nature of black oppression on its head.

The ISO and Alexander’s singular focus on mass incarceration as the embodiment of racial oppression has a purpose: it poses the fight for black freedom as a matter of “dismantling” that system, much as the civil rights movement dismantled Jim Crow. But mass black incarceration is both a symptom and a means of enforcing the special oppression of black people that is fundamental to American capitalism (see “From Slavery to Mass Incarceration: Black Liberation and the Fight for a Socialist America,” WV No. 955, 26 March 2010; reprinted in *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 21, February 2011). While the liberal-led civil rights movement could successfully challenge de jure segregation in the South, it could not challenge de facto segregation and black inequality in the U.S. as a whole.

In the face of mass protest, the bourgeoisie eventually acquiesced to legal equality in the South. Jim Crow had grown anachronistic—the mechanization of agriculture had largely displaced sharecropping. At the same time, blacks had become a significant part of the working class in Southern as well as Northern cities, such as in the steel industry in Birmingham, Alabama. Jim Crow also was an embarrassment overseas as U.S. imperialism postured as the champion of “democracy” in the Cold War against the Soviet Union, the industrial and military powerhouse of the non-capitalist world.

One factor helping to fuel the ISO’s dreams of building a popular movement for prison reform is that there are voices among the bourgeoisie complaining that the constant expansion and maintenance of the vast complex of prisons is just too costly, particularly at a time of massive budget shortfalls. But even if some sentences are scaled back and the prison population trimmed, it will no more achieve equality for black people than did the



no credit

NYC protest against state’s Rockefeller drug laws in June 2003.

abolition of official Jim Crow.

Indeed, the civil rights movement was defeated in the mid 1960s when it came North, where it ran straight up against the conditions of black impoverishment and oppression woven into the fabric of American capitalism: mass unemployment, rat-infested slums, crumbling schools, rampant police brutality. These conditions could not be eradicated by Congress passing a new civil rights act.

The civil rights struggles in which the black masses courageously confronted the white-supremacist police states of the South profoundly shook U.S. society. In the mid 1960s, the fight for black freedom intersected growing opposition to U.S. imperialism’s counterrevolutionary war in Vietnam, helping fuel broader political radicalization. The role of Martin Luther King Jr. and other liberal black misleaders was to channel social protest back into the fold of the Democratic Party, enforcers of racist capitalist rule no less than the Republicans. Under both parties, the federal government mobilized its police and judicial machinery to assassinate and imprison black militants. In his 1967 book *Where Do We Go From Here?* King urged America’s rulers to “seek to remove those conditions of poverty, insecurity and injustice which are the fertile soil in which the seed of Communism grows and develops.” King bemoaned the “sad fact” (for him) that many had been driven to “feel that only Marxism has the revolutionary spirit.”

The ISO and sundry other reformist outfits cover up for King by deceitfully portraying him as increasingly “revolu-

tionary” in the period before his April 1968 assassination. In a *Socialist Worker* article (19 January 2009) on King’s 1967 book, the ISO’s Brian Jones reverently claims: “In that last year of his life, he campaigned for radical, social-democratic reforms that are *still* far beyond what the Democratic Party is prepared to accept.” Alexander likewise cites the “revolutionary potential” of the “human rights movement” that King championed at the end of his life. Lamenting that King’s “poor people’s movement” never came to fruition, the ISO and Alexander see this as a model for protesting “the New Jim Crow.” King spoke out in moral opposition to the war in Vietnam and went to Memphis in April 1968 to support black union members. But while various leftists portray such activity as a turn to the working class, the fact is that King remained a pro-Democratic Party reformer and *opponent* of militant struggle against capitalist rule.

Black Democrats and the “War on Drugs”

The ISO’s call for a “new civil rights movement” has also been raised by the likes of Democrats Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, given particular impetus with the execution of Troy Davis last September and again with the murder of Trayvon Martin by a racist vigilante in Florida earlier this year. Both cases touched a raw nerve with black people. As they always have, Jackson and Sharpton acted to quell this outrage by funneling it into electoral politics and appeals to the federal government for “justice.” The ISO sang the same tune, arguing after the Trayvon Martin

murder for “federal investigations of local police murder and brutality cases” (socialistworker.org, 30 July).

Alexander writes that some “black activists” were “wittingly or unwittingly... complicit in the emergence of a penal system unprecedented in world history.” With Sharpton and Jackson it was very wittingly, as they both spent years championing the “war on drugs,” a fact that goes unmentioned in her book. As noted in Christian Parenti’s *Lockdown America* (1999), Jackson long ago called for the appointment of a “drug czar” and more funding for local police, ranting that “drug pushers are terrorists.” He got what he wanted, today bragging on his Web site that he advocated the drug war way before it “became accepted public policy.” Sharpton, for his part, led “community” vigilantes against reputed pushers in the 1980s. And both Jackson and Sharpton have for years fulminated against guns in the ghettos. Seizing guns and other means of self-defense is as much a driving force of the NYPD’s racist “stop and frisk” policy as the “drug war.”

While we would favor any measure mitigating the drug laws, no amount of tinkering will change their reactionary nature or racist enforcement. We call for the *decriminalization of drugs*, just as we call for abolishing all other laws against “crimes without victims”—prostitution, gambling, pornography, etc. By taking the profit out of the drug trade, decriminalization would also reduce the associated crime and other social pathology that have led much of the black population to support drug law enforcement. Upholding the right to self-defense, we strenuously oppose the capitalist rulers’ attempts to disarm those they exploit and oppress. No to gun control!

The ISO’s dream of a “new civil rights movement,” one that can “fix” a “broken system,” is premised on the tired liberal notion that the Democratic Party can be pressured into acting in the interests of working people and the oppressed. The ISO may now be somewhat embarrassed about it, but they were among those who enthused the loudest over Obama’s victory four years ago. Brian Jones wrote in *Socialist Worker* (6 November 2008) on election night: “Huge numbers of people are energized by the fact that, yes, we can elect a Black president. What we get from this president depends mostly on what happens to this energy, and less on the president himself.”

What working people, blacks and other minorities “got” from the Obama White House was a continuing assault on union gains, mounting job losses, deepening immiseration, the evisceration of civil

liberties under the “war on terror” and record numbers of deportations. Despite much talk of shifting tactics, the Obama administration has committed *more*, not less, money and resources to drug law enforcement, which will only deepen the misery. Meanwhile, U.S. imperialism has rampaged around the world from Iraq to Afghanistan to Libya.

Black radical academic Cornel West, who wrote a foreword to *The New Jim Crow*, is trying to keep the hope alive, calling in a *New York Times* (25 August 2011) op-ed piece for support to “progressive” bourgeois politicians. West concluded, “Like King, we need to put on our cemetery clothes and be coffin-ready for the next great democratic battle.” He’s right about one thing: the coffin is exactly where the road of Democratic Party pressure politics leads.

A Class-Struggle Perspective

In the ISO’s articles promoting a “new civil rights movement,” the working class barely registers on the radar screen. This is in keeping with their tailing of Alexander, who writes at length about the repressive measures adopted in the 1970s that mainly targeted black people but has not a word to say about the many thousands of workers, black and white, who engaged in hard-fought strikes in that period.

Black workers, who have for years had a higher rate of union membership than white workers, have been particularly hard hit by the onslaught against the labor movement kicked off by the 1981 smashing of the PATCO air traffic controllers union and the deindustrialization that has devastated cities across the Midwest and Northeast. The war on labor has been accompanied by an ongoing wholesale assault on the gains of the civil rights struggles, from busing for school integration to affirmative action in the universities. Even voting rights are increasingly under attack, as seen with the rash of voter ID laws and the massive disenfranchisement of felons.

As the last hired and first fired, black people were always overrepresented in America’s reserve army of unemployed, to be tapped when the economy needed them and discarded when it soured. But the country’s rulers increasingly see the black ghetto poor as expendable, with the prison cell substituted for the paycheck. The ongoing economic crisis has only compounded this situation. In mid June, over half the blacks in NYC who were old enough to work had not held a job since the start of the year. As Karl Marx put it in *Wage Labour and Capital* (1849): “Thus the forest of uplifted arms demanding work becomes ever thicker, while the

arms themselves become ever thinner.”

With the black ghettos simply written off, the bourgeoisie’s drive to imprison ever-increasing numbers of black youth reflects a sinister impulse to genocide. The great black comedian Richard Pryor once commented about the prisons, “Go in there looking for justice, and that’s all you find—just us.” If anything, that reality is even more staggering today. This lends added urgency to the observation in our seminal 1967 document “Black and Red”: “The fight must be fought *now* to maintain Negroes as part of the working class.”

Despite bearing the brunt of racist cutbacks and job losses, black workers continue to be a strategic component of the U.S. proletariat, which has the social power and historic interest to sweep away the decrepit capitalist system and its murderous police and prison apparatus. The all-sided attacks of the last four decades underscore the point made by Karl Marx at the time of the Civil War: “Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded.” By the same token, the failure of the union misleaders to mobilize labor’s power to combat black oppression has only further encouraged union-busting.

Under revolutionary leadership, black workers, who form an organic link to the downtrodden ghetto masses, will play a vanguard role in the struggles of the entire U.S. working class. It is the purpose of the Spartacist League to build a workers party that links the fight for black freedom to the struggle for proletarian state power. ■

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Gutting the Voting Rights Act Supreme Court Spits on Black Rights

“Our country has changed,” wrote Supreme Court Chief Justice Roberts in the majority decision striking down the section of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that gives it teeth. In a five-to-four ruling, the Court effectively found its “pre-clearance” provision, i.e., prior approval from the Justice Department to fiddle with voting rules, too onerous for those states subject to it.

The gutting of the Voting Rights Act, which in its own words was meant to “enforce the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution,” is nothing but a punch in the face to black people. Part of the legal consolidation of the democratic gains that black people won, gun in hand, in the Civil War, the Fifteenth Amendment granted the right to vote regardless of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” But following the defeat of Reconstruction, it became a dead letter in the states of the old Confederacy, which employed poll taxes, literacy tests and other dirty tricks—backed up by the lynch-rope terror of the Ku Klux Klan and local police (often intertwined)—to keep black people from casting their ballots. It took a mass movement, and no small sacrifice of lives, to crush Jim Crow segregation in the South and wrest reforms such as the Voting Rights Act from the ruling class.

Signaling how little racist capitalist America has changed, the states that had fallen under federal oversight celebrated the Supreme Court decision by immediately gearing up their machinery of voter suppression. Texas, Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina and Virginia rushed to implement new voter ID laws that will redound against not just black people but many others at the bottom of society—Latinos, the poor, the elderly. In Arizona, where authorities have gone to great lengths to one-up the Obama administration’s anti-immigrant crack-down, state attorney general Tom Horne



AP

Voting rights decision by Supreme Court gives green light to states’ efforts to suppress minority votes. NAACP student chapters demonstrate in Raleigh, N.C., against voter ID legislation, 24 April 2013.

railed that the Voting Rights Act “humiliates Arizona by making it say ‘Mother may I’ to the federal government every time it wants to change some remarkably minor laws.” Meanwhile, North Carolina and other states are moving to drastically cut early voting and eliminate same-day registration.

The Court’s ruling should come as no surprise. Chief Justice Roberts is but one of those on the Court who were schooled in the legal doctrine of “strict constructionism,” which in plain English means rolling back rights that black people and others have gained through struggle. Roberts has been devoted to this pursuit since his days as a Justice Department lawyer under Ronald Reagan. Commenting on Roberts’ and Samuel J. Alito’s confirmation hearings, we observed: “Theirs is not a mere ‘judicial philosophy’ but the

expression in the legal/judicial realm of the call that the ‘South will rise again’” (WV No. 864, 17 February 2006). For Senate Democrats at the time, the reactionary views of these Bush nominees were not an issue. Despite Democrats’ rancor over the Voting Rights Act decision, Barack Obama and his party have done their part to downplay the enduring character of racial oppression, not least through Obama’s much-lauded comment in 2008 that the civil rights movement took black people “90 percent of the way” to full equality.

The reality is that by every measure—employment, income, housing, education—the yawning gap between white and black America persists to this day. Nearly 50 years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, black people are still blown away on the streets of this country sim-

ply for their appearance, as was 17-year-old Trayvon Martin last year. Today his vigilante killer is on trial, but only because nationwide protest prompted his arrest. Across the country, the police routinely stop, frisk, beat and jail black youth, although not to the satisfaction of NYC mayor Michael Bloomberg, who recently lamented that “we disproportionately stop whites too much and minorities too little.” Mass incarceration has left some 13 percent of black men with felony convictions. If ever released, most of them continue to be stripped of basic rights, including the franchise.

The “end of racism” nonsense plays into the hands of right-wing reactionaries as they go about instilling their view that oppressed minorities deserve nothing, ever. Take Justice Antonin Scalia sneering in February that pre-clearance is the “perpetuation of a racial entitlement.” Cut of the same cloth was the Supreme Court’s recent seven-to-one ruling that puts another nail in the coffin of affirmative action—also a gain, however minimal, of the civil rights movement. The case was kicked back to a lower court for consideration under a new standard that will make it even harder for universities to consider race in admissions. The ongoing racist purge of higher education and skyrocketing tuition costs cry out for a fight for free, quality, racially integrated education for everyone, through the university level.

These judicial feats turning back the clock have been very easy to carry out. Why? Time and again, the capitalist Democratic Party politicians who pass for leaders of the black masses have diverted justified anger back into electoral politics, as have the bureaucrats atop the trade unions. The resulting low ebb in social and class struggle has put wind in the sails of the decades-long effort to roll back the gains of the civil rights movement, not to mention the ongoing war on labor that has hit black workers, most recently in the public-sector unions, especially hard. Historically comprising a reserve army of labor to be maintained, albeit minimally, for the American bourgeoisie, today the black ghetto poor are increasingly considered to be an expendable population.

It is crucial to defend voting rights and every other gain for black people, other minorities and the working class. Depriving the oppressed of basic democratic rights is a declaration that it is open season on them. At the same time, a serious defense of those rights would involve mobilizing not votes for “lesser evil” representatives of the class enemy but rather mass struggles against the racist capitalist rulers. Such a fight for the rights of the

**October 2009:
50,000 crowd
Detroit’s
Cobo Center
for 5,000
applications for
federal aid to
help pay rent
and utilities.**



oppressed would prove a powerful leaven to the class struggle of the working class as a whole.

Racial Oppression— Bedrock of U.S. Capitalism

Following the defeat of the South in the Civil War, the former slaves were liberated—codified in the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery—and extended such basic rights as the right to vote and hold office. This period of Radical Reconstruction was the most democratic in American history, with black rights enforced in the South at rifle-point by the interracial Union Army. Among the measures adopted were the Fourteenth Amendment—which conferred citizenship on “all persons born or naturalized in the United States,” an important protection for immigrants as well—and the Fifteenth Amendment.

Ultimately, though, the Northern bourgeoisie in pursuit of its class interests went on to betray Reconstruction, making common cause with Southern landholders to ensure the maintenance of private property in the means of production. This turn was exemplified by the Compromise of 1877, after which Union troops were ordered back to their barracks, opening the road for Jim Crow to ride in on the Klansman’s horse. The black population, although not returned to slavery, was solidified as a specially oppressed race-color caste.

With the mass migration of blacks from the South to the industrial cities of the North—initially around the time of World War I—the bourgeoisie increasingly fostered anti-black racism, making the color bar a dividing line that has served to obscure the fundamental class divide in society. To this day, racist poison plays a central role in blocking the development of class consciousness in the American proletariat. As a result, the U.S. is the only industrial country where the workers have not had their own independent

political party, even a reformist one. The legacy of black chattel slavery is behind much in the U.S. political system that is anti-democratic, e.g., the Senate, which is designed to favor less populous rural and Southern regions by granting each state equal representation.

Although the courageous struggles of the civil rights foot soldiers were instrumental in ending Jim Crow, the bourgeoisie had its own reasons for acquiescing. The system of legal segregation in the South had become outdated with the mechanization of agriculture and the growth of a black proletariat in the region. It was also a blemish on the U.S. image abroad. In countering American bourgeois propaganda that praised the virtues of “democracy,” the Soviet Union made hay of scenes of police dogs mauling and truncheons pummeling black men, women and children in the South. As Louis Menand related in the *New Yorker* (8 July): “American Presidents were trying to run a Cold War. They could live with Jim Crow when it was an invisible regional peculiarity, but once conditions were broadcast around the world they experienced an urgent need to make the problem go away.”

The strategy of Martin Luther King and other liberal civil rights leaders was to appeal to the “conscience” of the capitalist rulers, pinning their hopes on the beneficence of their courts and the Democratic Party in Washington. The ruling class was willing to make concessions in the sphere of democratic rights. But it would not and could not redress the abject material conditions besetting the black masses. The civil rights movement met its defeat when it came North, where it confronted the conditions of black impoverishment and oppression woven into the fabric of American capitalism: rat-infested slums, crumbling schools, mass unemployment and rampant cop terror.

The great Marxist revolutionary Leon

Trotsky, co-leader with V.I. Lenin of the 1917 Russian Revolution that brought the proletariat to power, described this dynamic in his 1922 report "The Position of the Republic and the Tasks of Young Workers":

"The bourgeoisie makes concessions to the working class: universal suffrage, social and factory legislation, national insurance, the shortening of the working day. The bourgeoisie makes a retreat step by step; where necessary it grants a reform; when possible it puts on the pressure again and then makes a retreat. Why? It is manoeuvring; the ruling class is fighting for its rule, for the exploitation of the other class. Of course the reformists suppose that bit by bit they will remake the bourgeois system into a socialist one. And we reply to this: rubbish!—while power is in the hands of the bourgeoisie they will measure out each reform but they know up to what point they can grant a reform. And just for this purpose they have the power in their hands."

What the bourgeoisie grants it also can take away. As the chipping away at the gains of the civil rights movement shows, reforms under capitalism are eminently reversible. The same is true for gay rights, now widely considered on firmer footing after another five-to-four Supreme Court ruling last month that declared unconstitutional a key provision of the anti-gay federal Defense of Marriage Act signed into law by Bill Clinton in 1996. That decision came amid increasing support among the bourgeoisie and more widely in society for extending to same-sex couples the institution of marriage—one of the means by which the ruling class exerts social control.

The only way to win social equality is to put an end to the capitalist system of exploitation. With black people historically a vital part of the American economy while at the same time in the mass forcibly segregated at its bottom, we advance the program of revolutionary integrationism. Fighting against all forms of discrimination and segregation, we understand that the liberation of black people can be achieved only through integration into an egalitarian socialist society. This perspective is counterposed to both liberal integrationism, which holds that black equality can be achieved within the confines of American capitalism, and black nationalism, which despairs of the possibility of overcoming racial divisions through united class struggle.

Liberalism and the American Nightmare

Adding a heavy dollop of cynicism to its reactionary ruling, the Supreme Court directed Congress to come up with a new, improved method of pre-clearance, well



Black youth in Selma, Alabama, protest at courthouse demanding voting rights, February 1965. AP

aware that lawmakers are unlikely to agree to any standard. But if you believe the NAACP and other liberal types, it is time to appeal to the "better angels" among the Congressional Republicans. Democratic Party mouthpiece Al Sharpton—one of the organizers of the August 24 "National Action to Realize the Dream" events commemorating the 50th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington—has pledged to "mobilize nationwide to put the pressure on Congress to come up with stricter voter protection laws."

The predictable reaction of top officials of the unions, many of which have endorsed the August 24 events, is to similarly preach faith in the politicians who look after the interests of racist American capitalism. In his statement on the Voting Rights Act decision, AFL-CIO head Richard Trumka declared: "We call on Congress with leadership from President Obama to live up to the ideals of our democracy by protecting and ensuring the right to vote for all." "Our" democracy is a society where the capitalist exploiters call the shots, offering up the electoral shell game to mask their class dictatorship. Barack Obama, the first black man elected president, took office at a time when the ruling class sought an effective Commander-in-Chief after the Bush-Cheney years, one who could sell the lie that rapacious U.S. imperialism was a bastion of democracy. He has delivered for them, advancing such American "ideals" as shredding democratic rights and expanding the surveillance state, pursuing the Afghanistan occupation and Libya bombing, deporting masses of immigrants and launching a crusade against teachers unions.

The real game for Sharpton, Trumka &

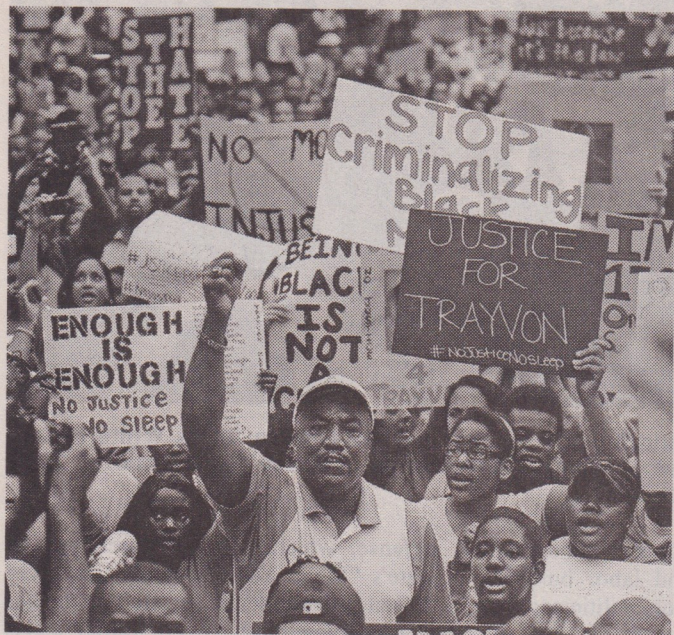
Co. is to bolster the fortunes of the Democratic Party. Racist voter suppression impacts black, Latino and student populations that in the main vote for the Democrats. As such, it is advantageous for the Republicans to carry out a naked assault on voting rights, although this backfired in 2012 when the black voter turnout rate was higher than that of whites, impelled in part by outrage over attempts to suppress the vote.

The outright bigotry of the Republican Party allows the Democrats to take for granted support from black people, and in the recent past it has also thrown a lot more Latino votes in their direction. As Malcolm X once wrote: "'Conservatism' in America's politics means 'Let's keep the n---ers in their place.' And 'liberalism' means 'Let's keep the knee-grows in their place—but tell them we'll treat them a little better; let's fool them more, with more promises.'" Although he lacked a revolutionary working-class perspective, Malcolm was a scathing truth-teller, pointedly referring to the original March on Washington as the "Farce on Washington."

Chattel slavery was abolished on the battlefields of the Civil War, the Second American Revolution. But a lot of unfinished business remains. It will take a Third American Revolution to do away with the system of wage slavery in which the oppression of black people is materially rooted. To this end, workers and the black masses must be broken from the grip of the Democratic Party. Workers need their own party, a revolutionary party capable of leading the struggle for an egalitarian socialist society, ushering in the dawn of black freedom. ■

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Zimmerman Goes Free, Detroit Goes Under



AP



Bloomberg

Left: 17 July 2013 protest in Orlando, Florida, following acquittal of George Zimmerman. Right: Detroit neighborhood in ruins, with headquarters of bailed-out General Motors in the background.

Capitalist America: Racist Hell

George Zimmerman was given a pass twice, first by the police, then by a jury, for the coldblooded murder of Trayvon Martin. With the racist vigilante again free to go about his business, protests flared up in cities across the country. It was impossible to mistake the message of the verdict in his trial: black life is as cheap as ever in capitalist America, where cops gun down youth in the streets with impunity and the vast majority are locked into the bottom rungs of the economy. This raw reality is playing out with a vengeance today in heavily black Detroit, the one-time Motor City that the auto bosses turned into a bankrupt industrial wasteland, at the cost of tens of thousands of decent-paying union jobs. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court's recent gutting of the 1965 Voting Rights Act is another blow at the democratic rights that black people have wrested through struggle.

As the Spartacist League wrote in a leaflet issued following the Zimmerman verdict: "Here was a case study in the machinery of courts, cops and prosecutors whose job is to maintain and defend a system rooted in the brutal exploitation of the many by the few—a system built on a bedrock of racial oppression, from chattel slavery to wage slavery." The expressions of anger and anguish at Zimmerman's acquittal compelled President Obama—the current boss of that system—to comment on the situation in a "surprise" speech on July 19.

Many black people found solace in his remarks, especially the account of his personal experiences with race prejudice before becoming a Senator and his acknowledgement of "a history of racial disparities in the application of our criminal laws." A common refrain is that the first black president wants to do right by

black people, but his "hands are tied" by hostile, mainly Republican, forces. The simple fact is that Obama has done the job that the main body of the ruling class selected him for: overseer for a capitalist profit system that criminalizes young black men and chews up the working people, spitting them out when their labor is no longer needed. Former president Bill Clinton also told black people that he felt for them as he put 100,000 more cops on the streets and ended "welfare as we know it." This speaks to the role of the two parties of capital: While the Republicans openly declare their contempt for blacks, immigrants and the unions, the Democrats say they're your friends...and end up doing the same thing.

Obama's remarks came on the same day that the White House again rejected out of hand the idea that the federal government would rescue Detroit, where what

remains of basic public services as well as the jobs, pensions and retiree health care benefits of city workers are on the chopping block. The Wall Street Democrat Obama—whose administration handed out trillions to the banks and tens of billions to the auto bosses—is showing an empty pocket to the city's black masses.

"Justice" System at Work

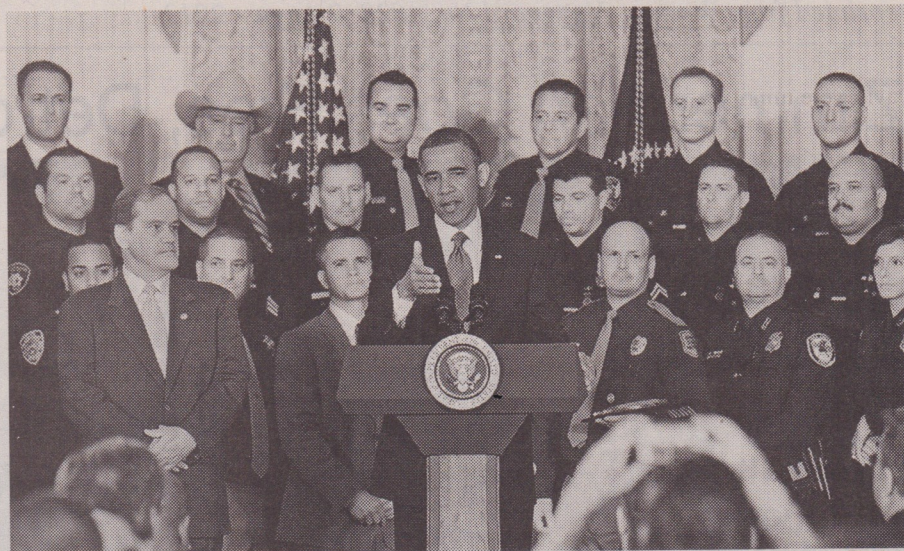
For all his lecturing on "racial profiling," Obama pronounced New York City police commissioner Ray Kelly "well-qualified" to run the Department of Homeland Security. Kelly is the architect of the city's notorious stop-and-frisk program, which he designed "to instill fear" in young blacks and Latinos. He also set up the NYPD's Demographics Unit, which has dispatched officers in the Northeast to spy on Muslims—fitting credentials for running the domestic "war on terror."

Obama endorsed the propriety of the Zimmerman trial, throwing in a threat against protesters who might engage in "violence." He also poured cold water on hopes about the outcome of the Justice Department's review of the case, intoning that the legal code and law enforcement are "traditionally done at the state and local levels, not at the federal level." Democratic Party liberals and mainstream black leaders widely lauded Obama's speech—as did the ever-obsequious International Socialist Organization (ISO), which wrote in "Why We're Still Marching" (*Socialist Worker*, 1 August) that the imperialist Commander-in-Chief "spoke powerfully" about racism.

When PBS host Tavis Smiley broke the mold and blasted Obama's talk as being as "weak as pre-sweetened Kool-Aid," he was heaped with abuse. Radical academic Cornel West, a onetime Obama supporter, is also getting flak for a July 22 interview with *Democracy Now!*, in which he called the president "a global George Zimmerman" for the lethal drone strikes in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen that have come to symbolize his execution of the "war on terror."

For his sharp comments, West is persona non grata for Al Sharpton and his National Action Network, the NAACP and others organizing the 50th anniversary March on Washington events this month. A key purpose for the liberal establishment that sponsored the 1963 march, where Martin Luther King delivered his "I have a dream" speech, was to keep the lid on the mass struggles for black rights that were shaking the country and to channel them into pressure politics for the benefit of the Democratic Party.

While there is a dearth of class and



Reuters

The Commander honoring the troops: Barack Obama hosts White House ceremony for winners of National Association of Police Organizations' "TOP COPS" award, 11 May 2013.

social struggle today, thanks in no small part to the hat-in-hand labor bureaucracy and black bourgeois politicians, the bankrupt liberal strategy remains the same: pressuring the federal government and pushing the fortunes of the Democratic Party. Even as delicate criticisms of Sharpton and the NAACP are offered, the ISO's "Still Marching" editorial expresses delight that such "mainstream groups" are organizing the protest, not least because it "will widen the mobilization, both for the Washington march and for anti-racist demonstrations generally." They predict, correctly, that criticism of Obama will be verboten from the platform, but that's no matter for the ISO—it's going to be big!

With their calls for federal civil rights charges to be brought against Zimmerman, the liberals sow illusions in the same Justice Department that serves as the top cops of a system of rampant racist police terror, frame-up trials and overflowing prisons. In fact, at a time when state prison populations have declined as a whole, mainly due to budget pressures, the federal prison system has grown by 3 percent annually. Attorney General Eric Holder may well do something to block the openly racist voter suppression measures adopted in Texas and other states in the wake of the Supreme Court decision on the Voting Rights Act. Such a step would simply be in the Democrats' own interest. The black people, immigrants and other minorities denied the right to vote by these measures generally go Democrat.

For the Right of Armed Self-Defense

The Sanford, Florida, jury accepted George Zimmerman's claim of self-

defense, which was buttressed by the state's "Stand Your Ground" law. Over 20 state governments, centered on the old Confederacy, have passed similar legislation with bipartisan support in recent years. We oppose such laws, which remove the guideline that a person in danger must seek to retreat before using deadly force. These laws thus sanction vigilantism. As we observed in "Trayvon Martin: Killed for Being Black in America" (WV No. 999, 30 March 2012), Florida's law "allows for the use of deadly force by anyone who claims a 'reasonable belief' that such force is necessary, without even attempting to disengage. And in racist America, a black kid in a hoodie is enough to claim 'reasonable belief' of danger."

For that matter, so is a group of black youths listening to rap music. In November 2012, four teenagers at a Florida gas station were in a parked SUV, next to the car of Michael Dunn, a white man. After complaining bitterly of the "thug music," Dunn opened fire on the SUV, killing 17-year-old Jordan Davis. Since his arrest, Dunn has invoked the "Stand Your Ground" defense on the basis that he believed the teens had a rifle (they did not) and were threatening to kill him.

Many liberals draw a straight line connecting opposition to "Stand Your Ground" with support for gun control. This amalgam is deadly dangerous for workers, black people and the poor. As Marxists, we support the right of armed self-defense and oppose gun control, the effect of which is to strengthen a monopoly of arms in the hands of the capitalist state—leaving guns in the hands of fascists, vigilantes and criminals as well as the cops. Working people must vigorously

defend the right to bear arms, which is supposedly guaranteed by the Constitution. Both Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis were minors, with no right to carry a firearm. If either had been armed, he might still be alive today. Of course, in racist America, survival might well have ended in a lengthy prison term, or even a death sentence. For simply firing a warning shot into the wall of her home during an argument with her husband, Marissa Alexander, a black mother of three, was recently sentenced to 20 years in a Florida prison after a judge denied her "Stand Your Ground" defense.

The crucial importance of armed self-defense for the fight for black rights was captured in a *New Yorker* (29 July) article by Jelani Cobb, despite its conflation of "Stand Your Ground" with the right to bear arms. Cobb noted:

"There is a long history of African-American support for gun rights and the principle of armed self-defense. In 1957, after receiving threats of violence, Robert F. Williams armed the N.A.A.C.P. chapter that he led in Monroe, North Carolina.... The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee activist Fannie Lou Hamer spoke publicly of the loaded guns that she kept under her bed, and members of organizations like the Deacons for Defense and Justice carried weapons with the goal of protecting civil-rights workers in the South."

Self-defense against racist terror has historically been met with state repression, including through gun control measures. In the 1960s, such laws were passed in New York and California to specifically target Malcolm X and the Black Panthers. State bans were followed by gun control laws nationwide, especially after the ghetto upheavals that broke out following Martin Luther King's assassination in 1968.

Capitalist Profit Drive Killed Detroit

Key to bourgeois liberal mythology in America is the notion that racism boils down to bad laws and bad ideas, obscuring the truth that black oppression is *materially* based. As Karl Marx explained a century and a half ago in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), the "totality of relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which corresponds definite forms of social consciousness."

The plight of Detroit throws into sharp relief the intertwining of black oppression and capitalist exploitation. When the city filed for bankruptcy on July 18, government spokesmen and the bourgeois press pointed the finger at mismanagement by

city officials. This was a convenient alibi for the main perpetrators: the auto companies that first brought in waves of labor—white and black, native-born and immigrant—to slave away on the assembly line, and then mercilessly chucked them out when those plants did not produce sufficient profit. Motown was left to crumble away as the culmination of a decades-long process of deindustrialization—a series of decisions by the barons of capital to pursue profit-making elsewhere.

At its height, Detroit was the hub of the auto industry, and the United Auto Workers (UAW) union, forged through strike action in the 1930s, became the powerhouse of the labor movement in the U.S. But between 1947 and 1963 Detroit lost 140,000 manufacturing jobs. When profit margins increasingly narrowed in the 1970s as a result of Japanese competition, the Big Three began in earnest to carry out waves of plant closures across the Midwest, moving a good deal of production to low-wage areas in the open shop South and overseas.

Shortly after the wreckers' ball had demolished Chrysler's Dodge Main, and with it 30,000 jobs, the Spartacist League ran two candidates for city council in 1981 on a platform "For a Socialist Fight to Defend Labor/Black Detroit!" The campaign noted: "Here in Detroit we see the crisis of the entire capitalist system most starkly revealed, most advanced in decay, most anarchic in irrationality, most painful in social consequences. Detroit's skilled proletariat would be the most valuable resource of a rational society—the class that can build a socialist America" (WV No. 287, 14 August 1981). Today, with only two auto factories and 27,000 manufacturing jobs remaining inside city limits, skilled and unskilled workers are trying to survive on low-wage McJobs, unemployment lines and soup kitchens.

Since 1950, Detroit's population has gone from 1.8 million to 700,000 today, leaving an 82 percent black population that the capitalist rulers consider surplus. From the liberal Coleman Young in the 1970s to the not-so-liberal Dave Bing today, black Democratic mayors have presided over the attacks on the city's residents. Adding insult to injury, white Republican governor Rick Snyder appointed an emergency manager, black lawyer Kevyn Orr, to conduct a fire sale of city assets and slash costs to the bone, beginning with unionized labor. Orr's main qualification to run the city is his having been part of Chrysler's legal team during the auto bailout.

From the outset, the massive bailout of the automakers focused on how best to gut the UAW and bring wages and benefits down to the level in non-union plants.

We opposed the bailout, warning that it "will be purchased through the further destruction of the jobs and livelihoods of working people" ("Bosses Declare War on UAW Workers," WV No. 926, 5 December 2008). Indeed, plant closures and mass layoffs followed, clearing the way for hiring new workers and temps at half the pay of senior workers when production picked up.

The UAW leadership enthusiastically agreed to these massive concessions, as well as a no-strike pledge good for six years. At the root of the labor traitors' capitulation is their support to the capitalist profit system—in particular the fortunes of the auto companies—and the "national interests" of U.S. imperialism. As UAW head Bob King told it during the 2012 elections, Obama had saved the auto industry with the bailout. With their program of class collaboration, the union tops have acceded to the proliferation of non-union plants, especially in the South—and now even Michigan has gone "right to work" like the Southern states. A first step in rebuilding the labor movement in this country will be to organize those plants, which means fighting head-on the color bar that has long served to divide workers and weaken their struggles against the bosses.

Such necessary struggles pose the need for a new leadership in the unions that is not beholden to the political parties of the class enemy. Such a leadership would use the weapons of the class struggle, not only to fight for jobs, better pay and conditions but also to wield labor's power in defense of the unemployed and the ghetto and barrio masses. This is a crucial part of the fight to forge a revolutionary workers party dedicated to the overthrow of the decaying capitalist order, which consigns the black masses to entrenched poverty, unemployment, rotten housing, segregated education and police terror.

A revolutionary leadership would seek to mobilize the working class, with its militant black component, to fight against every instance of racist injustice. This perspective flows from the understanding that black freedom will finally be achieved only when the capitalist exploiters are thrown from power and labor rules this society. This understanding was first imparted to the American Communist movement by the Bolshevik Party of V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky, which had succeeded in leading the working class in smashing capitalist rule in the October 1917 Russian Revolution. It is in this tradition that the Spartacist League seeks to build a workers party that emblazons on its banners the call: Black liberation through socialist revolution! ■

Honor Malcolm X, Militant Voice of Black Struggle

Manning Marable's *Malcolm X: A Liberal's "Reinvention"*

A Review

by J. L. Gormoff

Malcolm X was one of the most courageous political voices of the second half of the 20th century. At the time of his assassination in Harlem's Audubon Ballroom in 1965, when he was not yet 40 years old, he was the most admired and respected, the most hated and feared, black man of his generation. He spoke truths that other black leaders refused to say. Rejecting the pacifism of the liberal civil rights establishment, he was the voice of self-defense for black people. While Martin Luther King Jr., Bayard Rustin, A. Philip Randolph and others looked to Democratic politicians like John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson to grant black rights, Malcolm forthrightly denounced the Democratic Party, North and South, as racist to the core.

On the 20th anniversary of Malcolm's assassination, *Young Spartacus*, newspaper of the Spartacist League's youth organization at the time, wrote:

"At a critical moment in contemporary American history Malcolm X was *the* voice of black militancy. His importance and appeal lay, in particular, in his intransigent opposition to the 'white man's puppet Negro "leaders",' as he called them. Martin Luther King told the world that black people loved the white oppressor and would answer the racists' bombings and beatings with Christian forgiveness.... The idea that blacks had to prove to the 'good white massa' that they were peaceable folk and god-fearing Christians enraged Malcolm to the depths of his being. It was degrading. Like the sheep reminding the wolf when it's time for dinner. Malcolm X cut through the sanctimonious claptrap and foot-shuffling hypocrisy of the 'respectable' black leaders like a sharp knife going through a tub of butter."

—"Malcolm X: Courageous Fighter for Black Liberation," reprinted in *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 2 (1985)

In the decades since his assassination, Malcolm X has been claimed by people espousing almost every sort of politics. As early as November 1965, Rustin, a social democrat who for decades embodied the "moderate" black leadership that Malcolm X castigated as doing the bidding

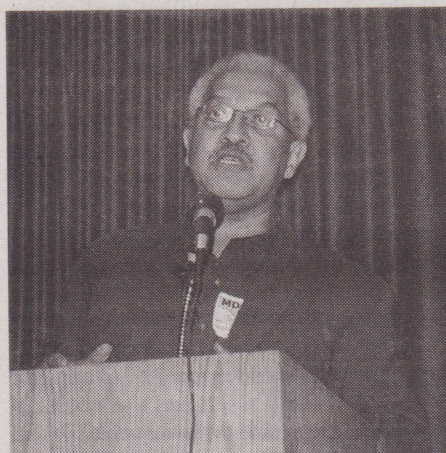
of the white rulers, asserted: "Malcolm was moving toward the mainstream of the civil rights movement when his life was cut short," although he "still had quite a way to go" (*Down the Line: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin* [1971]). *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* by Manning Marable is the latest in this genre.

For more than a decade, Marable, a professor at Columbia University and a leading liberal black intellectual, had been working on this biography; he died just before Viking published it last spring. The book is now out in paperback. Marable promised that his book would shatter everybody's view of Malcolm X. While his research has yielded some interesting details that fill in Malcolm's life, the book mainly covers ground dealt with more convincingly in *The Autobiography*

of Malcolm X, published shortly after his assassination.

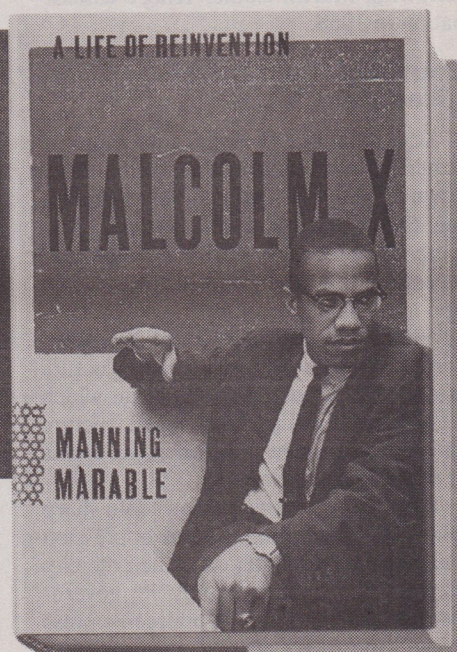
What Marable's book does offer is truly a "reinvention" of the political views of Malcolm X, a contradictory figure. Marable does his best to recast Malcolm as moving toward conventional liberal protest politics. As he puts it, at the time of his death Malcolm was approaching "the idea that perhaps blacks could someday become empowered within the existing system." Marable casts Malcolm X in today's terms as "a multicultural American icon" and "a man who emphasized grassroots and participatory politics." As Marable would have it, he cultivated "alliances with Third World nations" so that "black Americans could gain leverage to achieve racial empowerment." Beneath the trendy terminology, there is politics: Marable's book packages Malcolm X for the era of Barack Obama.

As is well known, after Malcolm broke with Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam (NOI), he went on a pilgrimage to Mecca.



Good/Next Left Notes

Manning Marable, opponent of militant struggle, addressing Movement for Democratic Society at February 2007 New York City conference.



There he was welcomed by Muslims of all races, leading to his renunciation of all racism. This was an important step. But for Professor Marable and many others before him, it was important because it presaged Malcolm's supposedly being reborn as a liberal integrationist. In other words, since Malcolm had supposedly broken from the NOI's black nationalism, then he must have been moving closer to the black liberal establishment. In fact, Malcolm X admitted that he did not yet know what his overall political philosophy was at that point. Marable's purpose is the same one that liberals and social democrats have always pursued: to counsel against militant struggle by black people and youth and to imbue them with faith in the lie that they can achieve social equality within the confines of the American capitalist system.

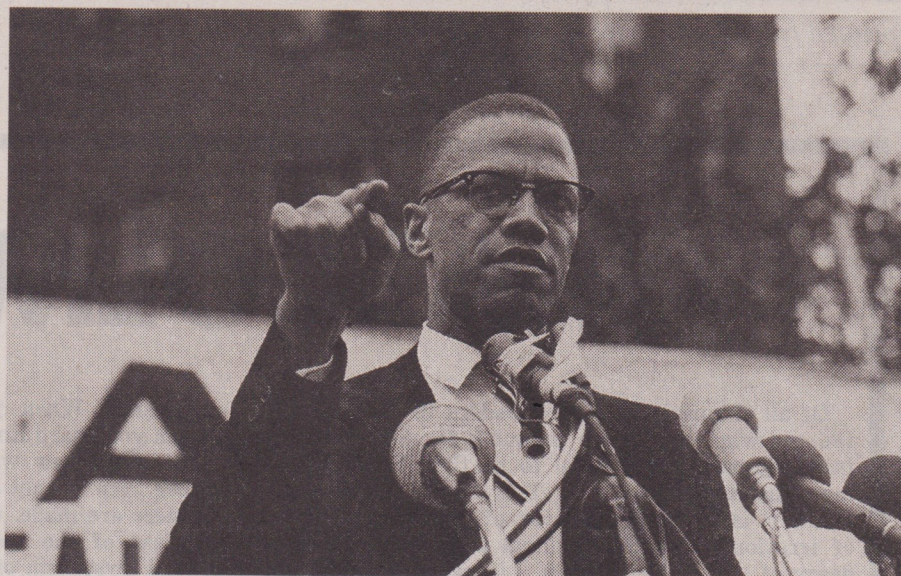
In our obituary in *Spartacist* No. 4, May-June 1965 (reprinted on page 32), we termed Malcolm X a "heroic and tragic figure" and summarized:

"Malcolm could move men deeply. He was the stuff of which mass leaders are made. Commencing his public life in the context of the apolitical, irrational religiosity and racial mysticism of the Muslim movement, his break toward politicalness and rationality was slow, painful and terribly incomplete. It is useless to speculate on how far it would have gone had he lived.... At the time of his death he had not yet developed a clear, explicit, and rational social program. Nor had he led his followers in the kind of transitional struggle necessary to the creation of a successful mass movement."

Never breaking from black nationalism, Malcolm X was far removed from our revolutionary Marxist worldview. For us, his significance was his ability to cut through the self-serving hypocrisy of bourgeois political discourse and expose the racism and oppression at the heart of this society. At his most effective, he mercilessly attacked the idea that black people seeking freedom should link their cause to the Democratic Party. He identified with the black masses who were being held in check by "preachers and the educated Negroes laden with degrees" (*Autobiography*) and exposed these leaders' subordination to the Democrats. This lesson remains no less crucial today and is for us the enduring legacy of Malcolm X.

"Reinvention" and Reconciliation

In the epilogue to his book, Marable criticizes "a tendency of historical revisionism," namely, attempts "to interpret Malcolm X through the powerful lens of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: that Malcolm was ultimately evolving into an integrationist, liberal reformer." He calls this "not only wrong, but unfair to both Mal-



Bettmann

Malcolm X speaking at New York City rally, June 1963.

colm and Martin." Yet in the very next paragraph, Marable claims of Malcolm that "at the end of his life he realized that blacks indeed could achieve representation and even power under America's constitutional system."

Marable's evidence is, first, what he terms "black encouragement." He draws a line from the "Black Power" movement that began in the mid 1960s to black politicians from Chicago mayor Harold Washington in the 1980s and Jesse Jackson up to Obama himself. (Marable references Obama no less than four times in the epilogue.) Second, Marable approvingly looks upon the 2001 United Nations World Conference Against Racism. This was a ludicrous appeal to the UN—that den of imperialist thieves, their accomplices and their victims—to turn itself into a force against racial oppression. Though Marable doesn't quite sign on to Obama's view that American society is "post-racial," he speculates that if Malcolm X were alive today he would "have to radically redefine self-determination and the meaning of black power." Whatever Malcolm X might have thought had he lived to see it, it's clear that for Professor Marable, Obama's empowerment signified black power.

Manning Marable was a social democrat—in other words, a reformist "socialist"—of some distinction. He had been a founding vice chair of the Democratic Socialists of America. Later he was an initiator of the Committees of Correspondence, a lash-up of various social democrats and former members of the Communist Party. In the late 1990s, he was a founder of the Black Radical Congress. Whatever their differences, the perspective of all these groups has been to try to

pressure the Democratic Party—currently the ruling party of American capitalism—to the left in order to serve the interests of workers, minorities and the poor.

Of course, Marable voted for Obama in 2008, calling this Wall Street Democrat "a progressive liberal" who "has read left literature, including my works, and he understands what socialism is" (*Socialist Review*, December 2008). Barack Obama is a servant of the capitalist system of exploitation and oppression and thus a committed enemy of socialism, which means the revolutionary working-class overthrow of the class he represents. He campaigned to become the first black Commander-in-Chief by explicitly praising the anti-Soviet Cold War and the presidential record of Ronald Reagan in carrying that out.

The main way that millions of youth, black and white, have learned about Malcolm X is through his *Autobiography*, a product of collaboration between Malcolm and black writer Alex Haley (who would go on to write the best-selling *Roots*). The *Autobiography* was recently named by *Time* magazine as the 13th most influential nonfiction book written in English since 1923. Marable was particularly disdainful toward Haley and the *Autobiography*. In a 2009 interview, he denounced Haley as "deeply hostile to Malcolm X's politics" because he "was a Republican, he was opposed to Black nationalism, and he was an integrationist" (*International Socialist Review*, January-February 2009).

Marable promised to present the *real* Malcolm, the one Haley had supposedly hidden. But on the whole, his book rehashes material that is already known. Much of the controversy about Marable's

MALCOLM X

Of all the national Negro leaders in this country, the one who was known uniquely for his militancy, intransigence, and refusal to be the liberals' front-man has been shot down. This new political assassination is another indicator of the rising current of irrationality and individual terrorism which the decay of our society begets. Liberal reaction is predictable, and predictably disgusting. They are, of course, opposed to assassination, and some may even contribute to the fund for the education of Malcolm's children, but their mourning at the death of the head of world imperialism had a considerably greater ring of sincerity than their regret at the murder of a black militant who wouldn't play their game.

Black Muslims?

The official story is that Black Muslims killed Malcolm. But we should not hasten to accept this to date unproved hypothesis. The New York Police, for example, had good cause to be afraid of Malcolm, and with the vast resources of blackmail and coercion which are at their disposal, they also had ample opportunity, and of course would have little reason to fear exposure were they involved. At the same time, the Muslim theory cannot be discounted out of hand because the Muslims are not a political group, and in substituting religion for science, and color mysticism for rational analysis, they have a world view which could encompass the efficacy and morality of assassination. A man who has a direct pipeline to God can justify anything.

No Program

The main point, however, is not who killed Malcolm, but why could he be killed? In the literal sense, of course, any man can be killed, but why was Malcolm particularly vulnerable? The answer to this question makes of Malcolm's death tragedy of the sharpest kind, and in the literal Greek sense. Liberals and Elijah have tried to make Malcolm a victim of his own (non-existent) doctrines of violence. This is totally wrong and totally hypocritical. Malcolm was the most dynamic national leader to have appeared in America in the last decade. Compared with him the famous Kennedy personality was a flimsy cardboard creation of money, publicity, makeup, and the media. Malcolm had none of these, but a righteous cause and iron character forged by white America in the fire of discrimination, addiction, prison, and incredible calumny. He had a difficult to define but almost tangible attribute called

charisma. When you heard Malcolm speak, even when you heard him say things that were wrong and confusing, you wanted to believe. Malcolm could move men deeply. He was the stuff of which mass leaders are made. Commencing his public life in the context of the apolitical, irrational religiosity and racial mysticism of the Muslim movement, his break toward politicalness and rationality was slow, painful, and terribly incomplete. It is useless to speculate on how far it would have gone had he lived. He had entered prison a burgler, an addict, and a victim. He emerged a Muslim and a free man forever. Elijah Muhammed and the Lost-Found Nation of Islam were thus inextricably bound up with his personal emancipation. In any event, at the time of his death he had not yet developed a clear, explicit, and rational social program. Nor had he led his followers in the kind of transitional struggle necessary to the creation of a successful mass movement. Lacking such a program, he could not develop cadres based on program. What cadre he had was based on Malcolm X instead. Hated and feared by the power structure, and the focus of the paranoid feelings of his former colleagues, his charisma made him dangerous, and his lack of developed program and cadre made him vulnerable. His death by violence had a high order of probability, as he himself clearly felt.

Heroic and Tragic Figure

The murder of Malcolm, and the disastrous consequences flowing from that murder for Malcolm's organization and black militancy in general, does not mean that the militant black movement can always be decapitated with a shotgun. True, there is an agonizing gap in black leadership today. On the one hand there are the respectable servants of the liberal establishment; men like James Farmer whose contemptible effort to blame Malcolm's murder on "Chinese Communists" will only hasten his eclipse as a leader, and on the other hand the ranks of the militants have yet to produce a man with the leadership potential of Malcolm. But such leadership will eventually be forthcoming. This is a statistical as well as a social certainty. This leadership, building on the experience of others such as Malcolm, and emancipated from his religiosity, will build a movement in which the black masses and their allies can lead the third great American revolution. Then Malcolm X will be remembered by black and white alike as a heroic and tragic figure in a dark period of our common history. ■

Bay Area Spartacist Committee, 2 March, 1965

book among black commentators has centered on its "exposé" that Malcolm, when he was a young hustler and petty criminal, supposedly engaged in "homosexual encounters" for money, or that later on Malcolm and his wife, Betty Shabazz, had marital problems. The furor about these "revelations" (which have been around since at least the early 1990s) only underscores how distant these talking heads are from even the memory of black struggle.

Black Oppression in Capitalist America

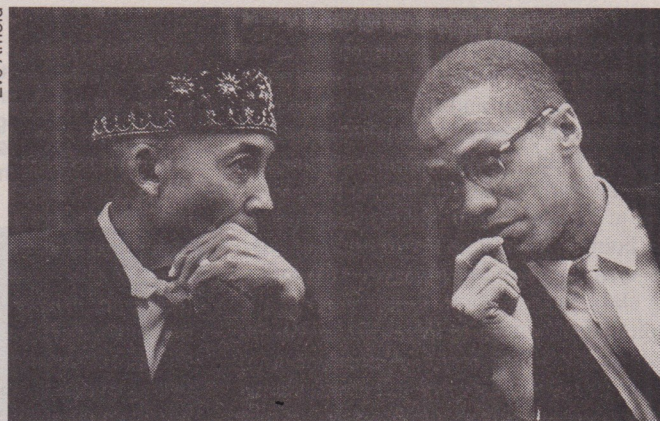
What does come through strongly in Marable's book is a picture of how deeply torn Malcolm X was between the Nation of Islam, with its rejection of political and social struggle, and his passion to join the battles taking place to finally free black people and complete the unfinished promise of the Civil War.

Black oppression has always been central to the American capitalist system. The Civil War (1861-65) destroyed the slave system in the South. But the Northern bourgeoisie, acting on its class interests, went on to make peace with the Southern planters, and blacks were forced into backbreaking labor on the land as sharecroppers and tenant farmers. Following the end of Union Army occupation of the South during Reconstruction, naked white-supremacist rule was restored. By the late 19th century, the white propertied classes had imposed and legally enshrined Jim Crow segregation, enforced by what was virtually a racist police state, and further backed by night-riding Klan terror and lynching. Black people were consolidated anew as a specially oppressed race-color caste, forcibly segregated at the bottom of the social and economic structure of American capitalism.

In the "Great Migration" that started during World War I, millions of black people moved to the North in search of greater freedom and to escape dire poverty. In the Northern cities, they became increasingly integrated into the industrial economy while facing segregation in housing and throughout social life. In World War II black servicemen served in separate units. But many came home vowing to get some of the "democracy" they supposedly had fought for.

By the 1950s, when the civil rights movement arose, the mechanization of agriculture had undermined the viability of Southern subsistence farming by sharecroppers. A significant black proletariat existed in Southern cities like Birmingham, Alabama, in industries like steel. Furthermore, in its pursuit of the Cold War against the Soviet Union, the U.S. government was finding the overt, offi-

Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad with Malcolm X in 1961.



cial discrimination against black citizens and the images of brutal sheriffs and racist mobs an acute embarrassment internationally. In 1954, the Supreme Court issued its famous *Brown* decision that overturned school segregation, without creating any way to actually integrate schools (or anything else in American society). More and more working people and students were becoming involved in protests against segregation in the South, which were ruthlessly suppressed.

From the outset, the civil rights movement was dominated by a black middle-class leadership allied to Democratic Party liberalism. Its aim was to pressure the federal government to grant formal legal equality to the Southern black population. The Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., with his Christian religious appeals to the conscience of those in power, became the exemplar of this wing of the movement. Riding on their coattails, along with the reformist Communist Party, were the leaders of the very right-wing social democracy in the U.S., such as A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin. These were Manning Marable's ideological forebears. By pledging nonviolence, King and the other "mainstream" civil rights leaders were pledging the movement's allegiance to the white power structure, promising that it would not go beyond the bounds set for it by the liberal wing of the ruling class. Advocacy of nonviolence dovetailed with the belief that black people could achieve equality and justice by relying on the government and "working within the system."

Malcolm X denounced these misleadings from the perspective of black nationalism. Strongly influenced by the struggles in colonial and neocolonial countries for emancipation from imperialist subjugation, Malcolm viewed the American black struggle as one of the liberation of an oppressed nation inside an imperialist metropolis. In one of his most influential speeches, "Message to the Grass Roots" (November 1963), he espoused "revolution" and defined it

in these terms: "Revolution...is based on land. A revolutionary wants land so he can set up his own nation, an independent nation." For Malcolm, nationalism was the key dividing line between his ideology and that of the liberal leaders marching for integration: "These Negroes aren't asking for any nation—they're trying to crawl back on the plantation."

Black nationalism is premised on the false idea that the doubly oppressed black population in the U.S. constitutes a separate nation. As a doctrine, nationalism can sometimes attract militants who are deeply alienated from this racist society and have no illusions that it can be reformed. Historically, it has meant for many of its proponents that black Americans should be given their own country, with some saying it should be situated in the so-called Southern "black belt," where black people were the majority. To others, it meant a homeland "back" in Africa.

However, in the 1960s the term "black nationalism" became a synonym for various forms of racial separatism *within the existing American capitalist state*. (For Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam, this had taken the form of a religious sect.) Under the rubric of "community control," the main body of young self-styled black "nationalists" sought to become government-funded overseers of the ghettos. Such types were denounced as "pork-chop nationalists" and "dashiki Democrats" by the militants of the Black Panther Party, which was founded in 1966 in Oakland, California. Considering themselves "Marxist-Leninists" along the lines of the Stalinist Mao Zedong, the Panthers advocated the right to armed self-defense and raised calls such as "black power." The Panthers sought to establish a paramilitary organization in the ghettos coexisting with and restraining the racist police. This effort, while heroic, resulted in their murderous repression given the existing balance of political forces.

Overwhelmingly, the thrust of black people's struggles has been for social

equality in this society, not separation. At bottom, black nationalism is an expression of hopelessness stemming from defeat, reflecting despair and the belief that the labor movement will never take up a fight for black rights. Black nationalism rejects the basic truth that the fundamental division in capitalist society is that between the bourgeois ruling class, which owns the means of production, and the working class, whose labor is exploited by the capitalists for profit. Moreover, the idea that the U.S. ruling class can be shamed or coerced into ceding a black homeland inside these borders is fantastical. Just as unrealistic is the notion that the bulk of the U.S. black population should renounce their claims to this country, which along with the working class as a whole they helped to build, and emigrate to Africa.

The Marxist program for black liberation is that of revolutionary integrationism: the struggle against all forms of racist discrimination and violence and for the integration of black people into an egalitarian, socialist society. As a race-color caste whose special oppression is integral to the workings of the American capitalist economy and every social institution, the black population cannot win equality except through socialist revolution. Black oppression and its legitimization through racist ideology are priceless tools for the exploiters in keeping working people divided, blinded and unable to organize to overthrow our common enemy. There can be no revolutionary workers party built in this country that does not grasp the strategic character of the fight for black emancipation. In building such a party, black workers are determined by history to play a vanguard role. This view stands flatly counterposed to both liberal integrationism and black nationalism.

Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam

The contours of Malcolm's life are well known. As "Detroit Red," Malcolm was a street hustler and petty criminal during the 1940s in Boston and Harlem. He converted to the Nation of Islam while in prison in Massachusetts, changing his name from Malcolm Little to Malcolm X.

The Nation was a small sect under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad that combined religious superstition and black nationalism. In the 1950s and early 1960s, Malcolm became its most visible and effective spokesman. He made the group known by his denunciations of the "respectable" civil rights leaders. He organized several mosques, including in Harlem, the primary center of black politics and culture in the U.S. As activ-

Schomburg Center



Marcus Garvey (inset) was leader of separatist Universal Negro Improvement Association, shown on parade in Harlem in 1924.

Library of Congress



ists were beaten and murdered, Malcolm was the only prominent black leader who asserted that black people should not beg to be integrated into American society. His denunciations of the liberal sellouts struck a chord among the ghetto poor and working-class blacks. But the Nation accepted the idea that America was a white man's country and *opposed* integration.

Marable describes the political roots of the Nation of Islam in the movement founded by Marcus Garvey in Jamaica in 1914. Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association grew rapidly in the U.S. during the 1920s, when it seemed to many that no black struggle for social integration and equality could succeed. This was a heyday of the KKK, exemplified by the 40,000 robed and hooded Klansmen who paraded openly in Washington, D.C., in 1925. Jim Crow segregation was the law of the South and was enforced by terror, legal and extralegal, as black men and women were lynched for not "knowing their place." Anti-Communist red scares were viciously waged in response to the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. The period was marked by aggressive union-busting, with notorious frame-ups of labor militants and prosecutions of unions under "criminal syndicalism" laws. Labor radicals and other immigrant workers were rounded up and deported.

Garvey's political philosophy was for complete black separation from whites, including the demand for an independent black state in Africa. He emphasized the development of black-owned busi-

nesses—i.e., a black middle class that would profit from its monopoly of the patronage of black consumers. Marable notes Garvey's continuity with the conservative, business-oriented philosophy of Booker T. Washington, pointing out that both Garvey and Washington were "accommodationists" who accepted segregation and did not challenge black disenfranchisement or separate schools for blacks and whites.

While other factors contributed to the destruction of Marcus Garvey's organization, its appeal was decisively undercut when working-class struggle exploded in the 1930s. Black workers played a vanguard role in heroic strikes which organized industrial unions in the CIO—inclusive unions that sought to organize all workers in a given industry, breaking down craft categories and organizing skilled and unskilled workers across ethnic and racial divisions. As the working class emerged fighting out of the doldrums of the Great Depression, the illusory solace offered by Garvey's brand of black nationalism tended to lose its appeal.

The Nation of Islam, which sprang up later, was primarily a religious organization. But its ideology was similar to Garvey's. Explicitly disavowing organized political activism, the Nation espoused separate "development" of blacks in "white" America. Dedicated cadres of Garvey's movement, Malcolm's parents relocated repeatedly, from Philadelphia to Omaha, Nebraska, and elsewhere before settling in Lansing, Michigan,

where Malcolm Little was raised.

By the early 1960s the Nation had begun to grow rapidly, attracting converts from diverse backgrounds. Malcolm X was personally responsible for a huge number of recruits, not only to Temple (later Mosque) No. 7 in Harlem, which he headed for years, but in many other cities, traveling the country as the NOI's National Minister.

Despite its opposition to participating in organized protest, its religiosity and its advocacy of black capitalism, the NOI was viewed as some kind of radical organization. In this racist country, black radicals or those perceived as such will always be a target for the political police (who especially fear the intersection of blacks and communism). The FBI and the New York police red squad were all over the NOI, employing constant surveillance and infiltration as well as provocations seeking to fan the flames of jealousy and distrust among its leaders. The sect was denied legal protections afforded other religions, and salesmen of its newspaper, *Muhammad Speaks*, were harassed by the cops. One of the strengths of Marable's book is its use of police records to demonstrate the extent of state surveillance, harassment and provocation of black militants, including Malcolm X.

The Crucible of the Civil Rights Struggles

The civil rights movement helped to undermine the reactionary Cold War consensus of the 1950s. Seen as a struggle against entrenched racial oppression and for equality, it drew many thousands of workers and youth into the streets of cities and towns in the South and inspired solidarity worldwide. As the struggle sharpened and racist atrocities against blacks multiplied, NAACP organizer Robert F.

Williams in North Carolina undertook armed self-defense. Williams was suspended from the NAACP, and in 1961 government repression drove him to flee the country to Cuba, where the revolution had just expropriated the capitalists in the face of U.S. imperialist hostility. In Louisiana, the Deacons for Defense, many of whom were Korean War veterans, organized to protect civil rights demonstrators.

In response to an emerging mass movement that showed increasing willingness to openly defy the Jim Crow police state, dominant sections of the Northern bourgeoisie saw that it was time for the South to adopt the same formal democratic norms as the rest of the country. It is to this wing of the bourgeoisie that the leaders of the civil rights movement handcuffed the fight for black freedom. The civil rights struggles won partial gains for black people in the South, such as access to public facilities, voting rights and a degree of school integration. But these gains did not challenge capitalist class rule. And when the movement came North and tried to take on the conditions of the segregated inner cities—widespread poverty and unemployment, racist cop brutality, inferior housing and schools, etc.—it foundered. These conditions of oppression and capitalist immiseration could not be ameliorated by more speeches or new laws. Beginning with Harlem in 1964, the Northern ghettos exploded, registering the depth of anger and disappointed hopes.

It was in the period of the civil rights movement that Malcolm X came of age politically, and this would throw him into an irreconcilable conflict with the NOI. The Nation's philosophy of black business helped enrich Muhammad (supposedly God's messenger) and his family, but offered no solution to black oppression. The NOI was a religious movement in a

political time; for all its inflammatory rhetoric, it stood aside from the struggle for civil rights, preaching individual religious enlightenment and renunciation of "sinful" conduct.

For Malcolm X, this religious ideology, which he deeply believed, became a wrenching contradiction with his passionate commitment to fight white supremacy, injustice and hypocrisy. He felt the pressure from young people who thought he ought to join them in militant action, stating in the *Autobiography*: "I felt that, wherever black people committed themselves in the Little Rocks and Birmingham and other places, militantly disciplined Muslims should also be there." But for the NOI to have participated in struggles for integration would have violated their precepts and their very reason for existence.

Malcolm X gave voice to young activists' increasing dissatisfaction with the housebroken civil rights leaders. Where liberals swooned as Reverend King intoned "I have a dream" at the 1963 March on Washington, Malcolm X termed the event "a circus, a performance that beat anything Hollywood could ever do." This was more than irreverence, it was an attack on the pro-Democratic Party politics of the organizers. He named the individual black leaders, closely tied to the Kennedy administration, who worked overtime to keep any militancy out of the march.

For Marable, the March on Washington was a marvelous mass movement that nobody in his right mind could have resisted: "The supposedly 'Uncle Tom' leaders like Rustin, Randolph, and King had mobilized a quarter of a million people," he writes. Marable goes on to say: "Malcolm argued that the Kennedy administration decided to 'co-opt' the demonstration.... Malcolm's thesis was



Left: Police attack civil rights march in Birmingham, 1963.

Right: Robert F. Williams (center), shown with other members of Monroe, North Carolina, NAACP in 1957, organized armed self-defense against KKK terror.





Martin Luther King Jr. (second from left) and other civil rights luminaries at White House with John F. Kennedy, 28 August 1963, the day of the march that Malcolm X called the "Farce on Washington." AP

that the civil rights leaders were so craven and bankrupt that they were duped by whites in power. This version of events was a gross distortion of the facts—yet it contained enough truth to capture an audience of unhappy black militants." The facts are that what could have been an angry outpouring was turned into an appeal for conscience and reconciliation. John Lewis of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which had begun to reject the preachers' allegiance to nonviolence, was prevented from delivering even a mild criticism of the Democrats. (Lewis later became a Democratic Congressman.)

Malcolm Breaks with Elijah Muhammad

Malcolm had by this time become increasingly alienated from Elijah Muhammad. He was shocked by the stories that could not be suppressed of the NOI leader's sexual relations with young women who were his secretaries. But fundamentally the sources of friction were political: Malcolm chafed at the Nation's aloofness from political activity, while Elijah Muhammad increasingly resented and feared Malcolm's popularity.

The conflict came to a head after the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963. Muhammad, not wanting to attract attention, ordered his supporters to say nothing whatsoever about the assassination. But Malcolm famously declared that Kennedy's assassination was a case of the "chickens coming home to roost," adding that "chickens coming home to roost never did make me sad; they've always made me glad." This disobedience infuriated Elijah Muhammad, but won Malcolm increased authority among the more militant black activists.

At that time, the most militant and politically conscious activists sympa-

thized with the Cuban Revolution and solidarized with other struggles for national and social liberation. Few of them shed any tears for U.S. imperialism's slain Commander-in-Chief, the man who had ordered the CIA-organized Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961 and had sent the Green Berets into South Vietnam. So when Malcolm made his "coming home to roost" comment, many black militants applauded, even if they were not themselves ready to go that far.

Marable's tactic of falsification by omission is especially clear in his treatment of the 1960-61 Cuban Revolution, which had created a workers state, although one that was bureaucratically deformed from its inception. Marable recounts Malcolm's strong sympathy and support for the revolution and the government of Fidel Castro, who had won plenty of support among American blacks when he decided to stay in Harlem's Hotel Theresa on a trip to address the United Nations. But nowhere in Marable's book is there any mention of the Democrat Kennedy's relentless efforts to overthrow the Cuban government, including engaging the Mafia in an attempt to assassinate Castro.

Elijah Muhammad purged Malcolm from the Nation and NOI leaders relentlessly denounced him, including Malcolm's former protégé, Louis X (today the reactionary demagogue Louis Farrakhan), who proclaimed him "worthy of death." Marable's book describes the NOI's vendetta against Malcolm, relying heavily on an interview with Farrakhan and presenting the latter's version of the events leading to the 1965 assassination.

That Malcolm felt liberated by his split from Elijah Muhammad was underlined by his telegram to American Nazi leader George Lincoln Rockwell, which Malcolm read out to a rally in Harlem on 24 January 1965. The NOI's racial separatism

had led it to recognize "common ground" with fascists and other segregationists, as Marable documents. Malcolm's message read:

"This is to warn you that I am no longer held in check from fighting white supremacists by Elijah Muhammad's separatist Black Muslim movement, and that if your present racist agitation against our people there in Alabama causes physical harm to Reverend King or any other black Americans who are only attempting to enjoy their rights as free human beings, that you and your Ku Klux Klan friends will be met with maximum physical retaliation from those of us who are not handcuffed by the disarming philosophy of nonviolence, and who believe in asserting our right of self-defense—by any means necessary."

Between his split from the Nation and his murder, Malcolm lived barely a year. Much of this was spent abroad, including his pilgrimage to Mecca. Although he founded two organizations in rapid succession—the Muslim Mosque Inc. and the Organization of Afro-American Unity—they had no real program beyond the eclectic views expressed in his speeches. While eventually millions would become aware of his impact, the organizations he founded probably never included more than a few hundred. Yet his impact on black activists and the nascent New Left radicalism was undeniable.

Malcolm X's speeches and his *Autobiography* were hugely influential for thousands of militants who would never have dreamed of attending a meeting of the Nation of Islam. His appeal lay precisely in his debunking of liberal hypocrisy on the part of the Democratic politicians and especially his exposure of the mainstream civil rights leaders as servants of the system.

Colonial Revolutions

Malcolm X was greatly influenced by the colonial revolutions that followed World War II, particularly in Africa and Asia. He and other militants were also deeply affected by the Cuban Revolution, which expropriated the capitalists in the face of American imperialist hostility in 1960 and opened the road to massive social advances benefiting working people and the poor. It was not lost on people like Malcolm X that the Cuban regime uprooted the island's own version of Jim Crow segregation.

Malcolm and many other black activists and leftists grasped that the fight against black oppression in the U.S. was linked to the struggle against U.S. violence and warfare abroad. Malcolm denounced the U.S. as "the chief imperialist nation of the world" and "the leader of a pack of

white imperialist nations" (quoted in Carlos Moore, *Pichón: A Memoir: Race and Revolution in Castro's Cuba* [2008]). He was astute in his denunciation of the assassination of Congolese independence leader Patrice Lumumba in a plot organized by the CIA, which later installed the murdering despot Moïse Tshombe as prime minister.

Malcolm believed that the dark-skinned colonial peoples of the world had liberated themselves or were about to liberate themselves from Western imperialism. He felt that the states of Asia and Africa were becoming powerful enemies of Washington and naively expected them to use what power they had on behalf of the American black population. This view was consistent with seeing the U.S. black struggle as a colonial liberation struggle within the imperialist metropolis.

Social revolutions had occurred in China, North Korea, North Vietnam and Cuba, expropriating the local bourgeois ruling classes and liberating these countries from imperialist bondage. Based on peasant insurgencies, with the working class removed as a factor, those revolutions resulted in bureaucratically deformed workers states under the rule of nationalist Stalinist regimes. But in a far larger number of former colonial countries, independence struggles resulted in the rule of

indigenous bourgeois classes.

As Marxists, we champion struggles for national liberation against direct imperialist rule. But we recognize that under the rule of bourgeois nationalist regimes, those societies remain dependent on the handful of capitalist-imperialist states of North America, Europe and Japan. As clients of the Soviet degenerated workers state, nationalist regimes such as Colonel Nasser's in Egypt were able to act with a certain independence from the imperialists while remaining subordinated to the capitalist world market. With the counter-revolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991-92, the main impediment to untrammelled imperialist plunder was removed, reinforcing the intense poverty and dependence of neocolonial Third World societies.

In a speech in Cairo to the Organization of African Unity, Malcolm naively implored this collection of bloodthirsty militarists, venal nationalist demagogues and tribal chiefs to step up, lamenting: "What makes our African brothers hesitate to bring the United States government before the United Nations?" An interesting chapter in Manning Marable's *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* makes clear, based on letters by Malcolm to family members during his 1964 trip to Africa, that the cordial relations he experi-

enced with representatives of the ruling elites were wide-ranging. Marable documents Malcolm's mutually appreciative encounters with Prince Faisal of the reactionary Saudi monarchy, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, a Nigerian cabinet minister, the Muslim Brotherhood in Lebanon, and the parliament of Ghana, among others.

The strength of Malcolm X was that he saw and spoke the truth about American social reality. He saw through liberal politicians (white and black) and indicted U.S. government hypocrisy as no one else did, although he was also not above engaging in occasional anti-Semitism. But when he looked at Africa through the prism of race, not class, he did not see the same hypocrisy of their ruling elites when they professed concern for the welfare of the people.

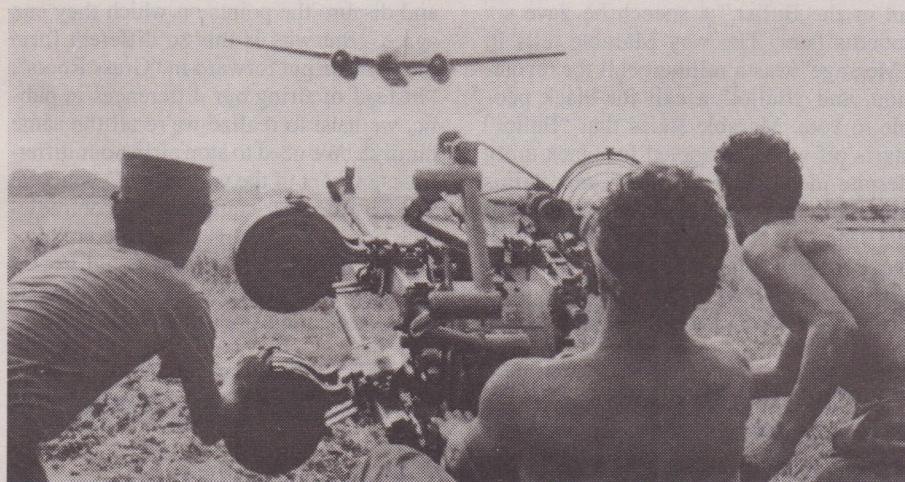
There are powerful concentrations of the proletariat in many parts of the neocolonial world. It is those working classes that, under the leadership of Leninist vanguard parties, can unite all the impoverished toilers in a fight to sweep away the local bourgeois rulers and liberate their countries from imperialist subordination as part of the struggle for world socialist revolution.

Marable Falsifies Malcolm X: The Democratic Party

At bottom, Manning Marable's *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* does indeed reinvent Malcolm X, falsely portraying him as moving toward mainstream liberalism during the tumultuous civil rights struggles of the 1960s. This serves to justify Marable's conviction that there were no options other than pro-Democratic Party pressure politics on the one side and passivity or sectarian abstentionism on the other. In Marable's eyes, once Malcolm X broke from the do-nothing policy of the Nation of Islam, allegiance to "working within the system" was sure to follow. He forecloses any possibility of revolutionary struggle against the racist capitalist order, both during the civil rights movement and now.

Let's look at two concrete examples of how Marable's politics distort Malcolm's record. One is Marable's presentation of the presidential election of 1964. The other is his comparison of two of Malcolm's most famous speeches, "Message to the Grass Roots" and "The Ballot or the Bullet."

According to Marable, Malcolm supported Arizona Republican Senator Barry Goldwater in his race against Democratic president Lyndon B. Johnson. Goldwater was an extremely right-wing, anti-Communist libertarian who had voted against the Civil Rights Act. He devised what was known as the Republican's "Southern Strategy," appealing to white



Raúl Corrales



Carl Nesfield

Above: Cuban fighters defeated counterrevolutionary 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. Left: Malcolm X and Fidel Castro in Harlem, 1960.

Democratic voters in the South on the basis of opposition to the civil rights movement. Goldwater lost in a landslide, but Republicans went on to use this strategy with great success starting with Richard Nixon in the next presidential election.

The civil rights leadership pushed blacks to vote for Johnson. Martin Luther King Jr. called Goldwater "the most dangerous man in America" (*Playboy*, January 1965), and Bayard Rustin wrote that Mississippi Senator James Eastland, a notorious racist, and Goldwater were "the main enemies" (*Commentary*, February 1965). A record 94 percent of black voters cast their ballots for the Democrat Johnson.

As for Malcolm X, Marable asserts: "Nearly alone among prominent black leaders, he continued to support Barry Goldwater as the better candidate to address blacks' interests." Marable's only evidence is the claim that Alex Haley, who co-authored *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, "cited an article by Malcolm, 'Why I Am for Goldwater'." While there is no *class difference* between a Republican and a Democrat, it would still be surprising if Malcolm X had supported an arch-reactionary for president—*except that it is not true*.

When one goes to the source of the supposed article in support of Goldwater—in Malcolm's papers at the Schomburg Center in Harlem—one finds no article by Malcolm. In fact, *Haley* was pitching to his literary agent something he imagined that Malcolm might write (Alex Haley to Paul Reynolds, 21 June 1964, Malcolm X Collection, reel 3). What Malcolm did write was an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* (12 September 1964) in which he made clear his opposition to both candidates:

"I feel that as far as the American black man is concerned, [Johnson and Goldwater] are both just about the same. It's just a question of Johnson, the fox, or Goldwater, the wolf.... Since these are the choices, the black man in America,

I think, only needs to pick which one he chooses to be eaten by, because they both will eat him."

He added:

"I wouldn't put myself in the position of voting for either one, or of recommending to any black man to do so. I'm just talking about if America's white voters *do* install Goldwater, the black people will at least know what they are dealing with."

With his slander of Malcolm's position on the elections, Marable echoes the *New York Times* (8 September 1964), which ran a piece titled "Malcolm X Article Favors Goldwater." What upset both the liberals at the *Times* and Marable was that Malcolm dared to point out *the real nature of the Democrats*. Malcolm X did not oppose Johnson in class terms, in other words, as a representative of the capitalist ruling class. But he understood that Johnson and the Democrats were enemies of black rights. And for Marable, if you don't vote Democrat, you support the Republicans.

Marable Falsifies Malcolm X: Electoralism

Central to Marable's book is the case he tries to make that Malcolm in his last years was moving toward garden-variety liberal politics and electoralism. This he does by, for example, contrasting "Message to the Grass Roots" (10 November 1963), which Malcolm delivered right before breaking from the Nation of Islam, and "The Ballot or the Bullet," a speech he gave six months later. The way Marable tells it, "Message" was a militant call for revolution, and "Ballot" a call for black people to vote. Marable states that "Ballot" starts off with "an appeal for black unity despite ideological quarrels" and claims that "this sentiment directly contradicted the 'Message to the Grassroots,' which had ridiculed King and other civil rights activists." In fact, rhetorical appeals to black unity combined with attacks on lib-

eral leaders were integral to *both* speeches.

Marable deplores exactly what made Malcolm X such an important figure. He's right to focus on "Grass Roots," which nailed the role of King, A. Philip Randolph, James Farmer and others by name in co-opting the August 1963 March on Washington:

"This is what they did with the march on Washington. They joined it. They didn't integrate it, they infiltrated it. They joined it, became a part of it, took it over. And as they took it over, it lost its militancy. It ceased to be angry...why, it even ceased to be a march. It became a picnic, a circus. Nothing but a circus, with clowns and all.... They controlled it so tight, they told those Negroes what time to hit town, how to come, where to stop, what signs to carry, what song to sing, what speech they could make, and what speech they couldn't make; and then told them to get out of town by sundown. And every one of those Toms was out of town by sundown."

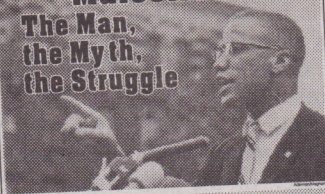
"Grass Roots" is also where Malcolm cogently pointed out that it was when the black population of Birmingham, Alabama, began to fight back against racist terror just three months before the D.C. march that President Kennedy sent in federal troops to restore order.

It is false to see a big political difference between "Grass Roots" and "Ballot." According to Marable, in the second speech Malcolm made a turn, urging that "Black people must forget their differences and discuss the points on which they can agree." But why is this so different from the position put forward in "Grass Roots": "Instead of airing our differences in public, we have to realize we're all the same family.... We need to stop airing our differences in front of the white man." Malcolm X was, from our standpoint, a contradictory figure. But in this case the contradiction is Marable's: Malcolm could urge a black "united front" at the same time as he made clear his opposition to the politics

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of the liberal black leaders—they were the ones betraying the black masses. After all, it was in “Ballot” that Malcolm declared: “I don’t see any American dream; I see an American nightmare.”

For Marable, by the time of “Ballot,” supposedly “Malcolm had come to see the vote as a necessary tool if black Americans were to take control of the institutions in their communities.” Marable criticizes Malcolm for “glaring inconsistency in his logic,” because “Malcolm was encouraging African Americans to vote, even to throw their weight behind either major party; yet simultaneously he accused both major parties of racism, incapable of delivering fairness to blacks.”

In “Ballot,” Malcolm *does* highlight the importance of blacks’ votes in the North, but in terms counterposed to Marable’s liberal interpretation: “Your vote, your dumb vote, your ignorant vote, your wasted vote put in an administration in Washington, D.C., that has seen fit to pass every kind of legislation imaginable, saving you until the last, then filibustering on top of that.” Filibustering was how Dixiecrats like Senator Eastland tried to kill civil rights bills. Malcolm X grasped how the Democrats’ division of labor worked. Addressing the role of liberal Democrats, he said: “They blame the Dixiecrats. What is a Dixiecrat? A Democrat. A Dixiecrat is nothing but a Democrat in disguise.... When you keep the Democrats in power, you’re keeping the Dixiecrats in power.”

As Malcolm put it in a subsequent speech: “The Northern Dixiecrat puts all the blame on the Southern Dixiecrat. It’s a con game, a giant political con game” (“The Black Revolution,” 8 April 1964). This con game continues to be played out today, as the craven trade-union officialdom and black liberal politicians promote the “lesser evil” capitalist Democrats against the Republicans. While the Republicans make no pretense of being “friends” of labor, black people and immigrants, the Democrats lie about it and do the same things.

The Struggle for Revolutionary Leadership

There have been few historical conjunctures when a small Marxist propaganda group could, in a few years’ time, transform itself into a party leading a significant section of the proletariat and the oppressed. The South in the early 1960s offered such an opportunity. The mass movement of proletarians and students for black rights was seething and activists were learning painful lessons about the nature of the capitalist state, leading to impassioned debates over strategy and tactics and the politics underlying them. By 1964, the main body of young black

**Cartoon from
Communist Party
newspaper openly
supports
Franklin D.
Roosevelt and
U.S. imperialism
during WWII.**



Fred Ellis

militants, concentrated in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, had broken with liberalism as they understood it but had not yet latched on to the political dead end of black separatism. At the same time, these young fighters on the front lines of the struggle against white supremacy had acquired enormous moral and political authority among the black masses in the South, including members of the industrial proletariat.

The reformist Communist Party (CP) had no appeal for radicalizing elements in this period. In the time of V.I. Lenin, the central leader of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, the Communist International had pressed American Communists to pay special attention to the fight against black oppression. The CP won some impressive recruits from among black intellectuals and went on to build a base in the South in the late 1920s and '30s. Despite its developing Stalinist degeneration, the CP was at that time still capable of some quite heroic struggles. To take one example, it organized Southern sharecroppers' unions that sought to include poor whites as well as blacks. In Atlanta in 1932, in the depths of the Great Depression, the CP led a large, racially integrated march of unemployed workers that braved fierce repression and Klan terror in order to demand relief.

Such struggles were impossible without opposing the whole Southern power structure, including the Democratic Party. These efforts, and the black working people who had been mobilized by them, were abandoned when in the mid 1930s the CP became open supporters of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the name of the “people’s front.” The CP could not even bring itself to support the mild-mannered 1941 March on Washington movement led by A. Philip Randolph because nothing was to be allowed to mute its chauvinist

support for U.S. imperialism’s war effort in World War II. For the same reason, the CP actively broke strikes and even suspended its Japanese American members during the wartime internment.

In sharp contrast, the American Trotskyist movement stood for working-class politics independent of the Democratic Party as well as the Republicans. Led by James P. Cannon, a founder of American Communism who was won to Trotskyism at the 1928 Sixth World Congress of the Communist International, the Trotskyists were expelled from the CP in 1928, forming the Communist League of America and, in 1938, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). As part of its revolutionary program, the SWP stood for racial integration and equal rights for the black population.

However, by the early 1960s, the SWP, weakened by the anti-Communist repression and intense conservatism of the post-WWII period, had begun to move rapidly to the right in response to perceived opportunities. This found grotesque expression when the SWP sent condolences to John F. Kennedy’s widow after his assassination. Our political tendency, now called the International Communist League, arose out of a factional struggle inside the SWP that was triggered partly over the question of black liberation. Our founding cadres, organized in the Revolutionary Tendency (RT), fought equally against the SWP’s opportunism over the Cuban Revolution, as the party uncritically supported the petty-bourgeois Fidel Castro leadership. Our comrades were expelled from the SWP in 1963-64 and went on to found the Spartacist League in 1966. By the fall of 1965, the SWP had crossed the class line into reformism with its overt class collaborationism in the burgeoning protests against the Vietnam War, building platforms for liberal Democrats who

were beginning to see the war as a losing proposition for U.S. imperialism.

Instead of fighting to win black militants such as those in SNCC to a revolutionary program, the SWP argued that black people needed their own party. This served as the rationale to tail, successively and sometimes simultaneously, pro-Democratic Party civil rights leaders as well as sundry black nationalists. In opposition to the SWP's abstentionism, the RT argued in July 1963 that the party should send members to the South to participate in the struggle. In a document submitted as part of internal party discussion, the RT argued in opposition to a draft resolution of the SWP's Political Committee (PC):

"Negroes who are activists in the movement, such as, for example, the full-time militants around SNCC, are every day formulating concepts of struggle for the movement. The meaning of the line of the PC draft is that we are not interested in recruiting these people to our white party because we have the revolutionary socialist program for the section of the working class of which we are the vanguard, and *they* (Negro militants) must lead *their own* struggle, although we would like to have fraternal relations with them. This is the meaning of the PC draft.

"To the concept of the white party must be counterposed the concept of the revolutionary party. For if we are only the former, then black workers are misplaced in the SWP."

—"For Black Trotskyism"
(reprinted in *Marxist Bulletin*
No. 5 [Revised], "What Strategy
for Black Liberation? Trotsky-
ism vs. Black Nationalism"
[September 1978])

This document laid out our political orientation:

"Our point of departure comes in turn as the *conclusion* that the Negro question is so deeply built into the American capitalist class-structure—regionally and nationally—that only the *destruction* of existing class relations and the change in class dominance—the passing of power into the hands of the working class—will suffice to strike at the heart of racism and bring about a solution both real and durable."

Our strategic perspective was to recruit the left wing of the civil rights movement into a revolutionary party capable of leading vanguard layers of the black working class and petty-bourgeois youth in the South. The RT put forward a series of demands linking the struggles of workers and the black masses and addressing immediate needs such as organized self-defense and union organizing drives throughout the South. As volunteers were risking their lives to register black voters, we called for independent political organization so that voting could mean something other than supporting Democrats.

The RT and the early Spartacist League raised such transitional demands as the call for a Freedom Labor Party. These demands



Highlander Center

Above: Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee workshop in Knoxville, Tennessee, 1962. Below: Call for Freedom-Labor Party was part of SL's perspective to unite left wing of civil rights movement with labor militants in a revolutionary struggle against capitalism.

were aimed at uniting the ranks of the trade unions—the workers' basic organizations of self-defense against the exploiting class—with the militant masses in the civil rights movement behind a perspective of socialist revolution. This fusion could not come about through preachments of unity, but only by the union movement actively taking up the fight for the rights of the specially oppressed black population. The obstacle to uniting the working people in revolutionary struggle against the capitalist system was not only the liberal preachers. It was, principally, the sellout labor bureaucrats, who matched King & Co. in fidelity to the Democratic Party.

When Malcolm X came to political awareness, the main body of the union bureaucracy consisted of the open Cold War crusaders at the head of the AFL-CIO, who had been installed by the anti-red purges in the late 1940s and '50s. Another section of the labor tops, epitomized by the United Auto Workers' Walter Reuther, tried to strike a slicker pose with vague social-democratic rhetoric. As Malcolm X noted, Reuther & Co. were closely tied to the pro-Democratic Party civil rights leaders and served as a prop of the Kennedy administration.

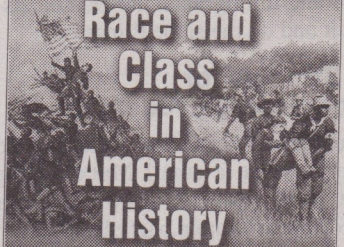
Both wings of the labor bureaucracy were explicitly hostile to labor militancy and to the militant wing of civil rights activism. Both wings were outspoken enemies of Communism and acted as agencies of U.S. imperialism abroad, supporting reactionary pro-American regimes and spearheading efforts to smash leftist-led unions. Their despicable political profile contributed hugely to the view of black and other New Left radicals that the unions themselves were a part of "the system" and enemies of liberation. Identifying the working class as a whole with the sellout leaders at the top is a fallacy that to this day contributes to anti-union prejudices, undermining any perspective of fighting inside the unions for a class-struggle leadership.

Unlike many others on the left, who patronizingly enthused over whatever was popular, the Spartacist League was forthright in advancing our Marxist views and criticisms. When the slogan of "black power" was put forward, we wrote that it "represents the repudiation of tokenism, liberal tutelage, reliance on the federal government, and the nonviolent philosophy of moral suasion. In this sense, therefore, black power is class power, and should be supported by all socialist forces"

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("Black Power—Class Power," *Spartacist West* No. 8, September 1966; reprinted in *Marxist Bulletin* No. 5 [Revised]). But we also warned that the slogan "can be used by petty bourgeois black nationalist elements who want to slice the social cake along color rather than class lines and to promote reactionary color mysticism. More seriously, it can be degraded to mean mere support for black politicians operating within the system."

Indeed, within a few years, the larger wing of the Black Panthers' leadership had begun to openly look to the Democratic Party. In 1973 Panther leader Bobby Seale ran as a Democrat for mayor of Oakland, California. "Black Power" increasingly came to be defined as "black control of the black community," which meant more black businesses, the election of black mayors to preside over the misery of the big cities, and more black cops to participate in shooting down blacks.

Marable and "Trotskyism"

Marable takes as good coin the revisionist SWP's portrayal of "Trotskyism," promoting the party's opportunist tailism of whatever leaders black people seemed to want. Marable writes:

"For decades, the SWP had promoted revolutionary black nationalism. Leon Trotsky himself had believed that Negro Americans would be the vanguard for the inevitable socialist revolution in the United States. Malcolm's separation from the Nation of Islam and his endorsement of voter registration and mass protest by African Americans seemed to Trotskyists a move toward socialism."

Marable goes on to wrongly state in a footnote that Trotskyism "meant that the vanguard of the socialist revolution would not come from the industrial proletariat, but from the most oppressed sectors of the working class and peasantry," which in the U.S. meant black people.

Shortly after Malcolm died, longtime SWP cadre George Breitman wrote *The Last Year of Malcolm X* (1967), which argued: "Malcolm was pro-socialist in the last year of his life, but not yet a Marxist." Breitman would go on to proclaim Malcolm an increasingly pro-socialist "revolutionary." For the SWP to call Malcolm X a socialist was in keeping with renouncing its former revolutionary socialist program and adapting to many non-proletarian forces that falsely appropriated the term "socialist," such as the Algerian Ben Bella government and Egypt under Nasser, both of which were bourgeois-nationalist regimes.

The SWP's use of Trotsky's authority in regard to the black struggle was also fraudulent. Trotsky's rare comments concerning American blacks were consistent with the mistaken understanding that they

might constitute a nation and hence with raising a slogan of self-determination. But it is a travesty to suggest that Trotsky would ever have entertained the notion of organizing separate "revolutionary" parties by race. In discussions with the SWP leadership in 1939, Trotsky reminded the comrades that the roots of opportunism in the trade unions in the U.S. lay in their being based on the "aristocracy of labor"—privileged layers who sided with the bourgeois class "to hold the Negroes and the unskilled workers down to a very low scale." Correctly identifying black workers as "the most dynamic milieu of the working class," he insisted: "We must say to the conscious elements of the Negroes that they are convoked by the historic development to become a vanguard of the working class.... If it happens that we in the SWP are not able to find the road to this stratum, then we are not worthy at all. The permanent revolution and all the rest would be only a lie."

The Spartacist League's political program, representing a revolutionary alternative to both the liberal-integrationist and black nationalist dead ends, powerfully spoke to felt needs, but our very small organization was not able to pose it forcefully before the mass of radicalizing black activists. The early SL made promising beginnings in exemplary mass work, illustrating our program through such actions as organizing defense of Bill Epton, a black Progressive Labor supporter who was prosecuted in the wake of the 1964 Harlem "riot"—in reality, a police riot against the people of Harlem. With the ghetto in police lockdown, we initiated the Harlem Solidarity Committee, which organized a 1,000-strong rally in NYC's garment district to mobilize working-class support for the besieged black people.

Ultimately, we were frozen out by black nationalist currents that claimed to reject liberal gradualism and tokenism. The opportunism of organizations such as the SWP let pass a promising opportunity to recruit substantial numbers of black radicals to a perspective of socialist revolution and to develop them as cadres and leaders of a Leninist vanguard party.

The black freedom struggle—and in fact the whole working class—paid heavily for black radicals' inability to find the levers to polarize capitalist society along class lines, as the nationalists rejected any revolutionary potential for white workers. The isolation of the Black Panthers and others from the working class and the trade unions increased their vulnerability to the racist capitalist state as it extracted murderous vengeance. Through cop repression and the FBI's infamous



Stephen Shames

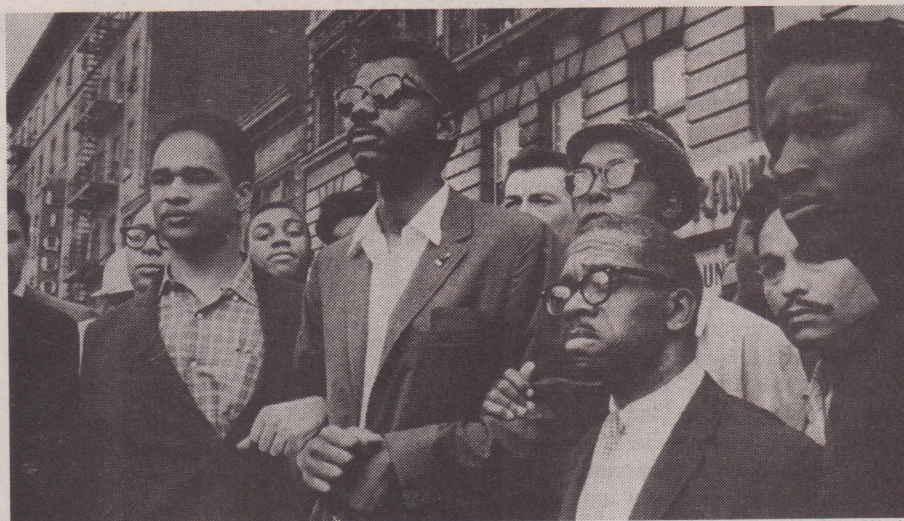
Bobby Seale, Democratic Party candidate for Oakland mayor, 1973.

COINTELPRO operation, dozens of leaders and militants were shot down and many others framed up and thrown in jail. These attacks broke the back of the Panthers, whose fragmentation—assisted by agents provocateurs, forged documents and other police "dirty tricks"—led to most of their leading members moving sharply to the right.

Malcolm X and the Left Today

In a suitably scathing review of *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, black columnist Glen Ford takes on Marable's assertion that Malcolm's later activities "marked an early, tentative concession to the idea that perhaps blacks could someday become empowered within the existing system" ("Dragging Malcolm X to Obamaland," *Black Agenda Report*, 27 April 2011). Ford comments that "Marable and his circle" are "the left Black Obamaites, purported radicals who have a perpetual love affair with Power." However, behind Ford's *bons mots* is a bankrupt black nationalist outlook, which obliterates a *class* understanding of Obama's role as chief executive of the racist U.S. capitalist order. In 2008, Ford himself supported the candidacy of Cynthia McKinney, a black former Democratic Congresswoman from Georgia who was running on the ticket of the Green Party, a small-fry capitalist party.

The reactions to Marable's book by the ostensibly socialist left show how much they accept his basic framework of either liberal integration or black nationalism, in



Wide World

Above: Bill Epton (center) at banned march in Harlem, 1964, just before arrest. Below: Spartacist speaker (foreground, with bullhorn) addressed SL-initiated rally in NYC garment district to mobilize labor in defense of ghetto masses during 1964 Harlem cop riot.



New York Times

opposition to a revolutionary alternative. In *Liberation News* (11 June 2011), the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) points out Marable's distortion of Malcolm's comments about electoralism. But for the PSL, the bottom line is that "there is nothing inconsistent about condemning the two major parties while suggesting that Black people vote strategically. A revolutionary makes use of all tactics that advance the struggle at a particular moment, provided that this does not foster illusions in the current system."

This is the pretext that the PSL's forebears in the Workers World Party (WWP) have used to backhandedly support black

capitalist politicians in the name of "fighting the right." In the 1980s, it was the presidential campaigns of Jesse Jackson; today, the WWP hails New York City Councilman Charles Barron. Marxists fight for the class independence of the working class, for a *workers party that fights against all oppression and for black liberation through socialist revolution!*

For 20 or 30 years it has been common on the reformist left to reconcile Malcolm X to the politics of Martin Luther King. The reformists all share the perspective of pressuring the Democrats to do good things, either overtly or backhandedly. Virtually all of them cheered Obama's election and

will do their best to find ways to get back on the bandwagon in this election year. In the end, the reformists are reduced to quibbling over this or that in Marable's book, which distorts Malcolm X's political trajectory to serve a very contemporary purpose, including by absurdly depicting Malcolm X as becoming "race neutral." Marable's book takes for granted that the civil rights movement succeeded. In terms of the limited objectives of its pro-government leaders, it did. But it benefited mainly a thin layer of middle-class blacks, the traditional "talented tenth" in the professions augmented by a layer of government bureaucrats and a few elected officials.

What we see in America today is not the "post-racial" society invoked by Barack Obama but the failure of the liberal civil rights movement to fundamentally better the lives of this oppressed layer of American capitalist society. In the U.S. today, the prison system is one of the few growth industries, accompanying the deindustrialization of recent decades. Starting with Jesse Jackson himself, the black politicians who Marable sees as proof of "empowerment" early on enrolled themselves as champions of the "war on drugs," which has resulted in mass incarceration of black people as well as a growing number of Latinos and others. The current economic crisis has underlined the vulnerability of the black population, measured by such indices as the enormous gap in household net wealth between white and black families, as the Great Depression of the 1930s did in its day. It must be obvious to all that capitalism is not bringing prosperity to white working people either.

The simple truth is that there will be no end to black oppression, exploitation and imperialist war until the multiracial working class seizes power from the tiny handful that constitutes the capitalist class and reorganizes society on a socialist basis. As in the days when Malcolm X gave voice to the oppressed black masses, what needs to be done is to forge a revolutionary party that can provide the necessary leadership for the working class and the oppressed. In our obituary on Malcolm X in *Spartacist* No. 4, May-June 1965, we noted the "agonizing gap in black leadership today," a condition that has grown even more acute since that time. Our obituary concluded:

"But such leadership will eventually be forthcoming. This is a statistical as well as a social certainty. This leadership, building on the experience of others such as Malcolm, and emancipated from his religiosity, will build a movement in which the black masses and their allies can lead the third great American revolution. Then Malcolm X will be remembered by black and white alike as a heroic and tragic figure in a dark period of our common history." ■

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“Separate but Equal” Poison

The Rehabilitation of Booker T. Washington



Library of Congress



Doubleday, Page & Company

Booker T. Washington exhorted black people to accept segregation, not struggle for equality, in post-Reconstruction South. Right: Image shows students cultivating sweet potatoes at his Tuskegee Institute.

The following is a presentation, edited for publication, by Don Alexander of the Spartacist League Central Committee at a 6 March 2012 forum in New York City.

In part, the origin of this talk grew out of my returning from doing political work in South Africa a decade ago. I noticed coming back here that a lot of black people were reading Booker T. Washington. I went also to my hometown in Southern California, and some very little black newspaper there had a series of articles on him. And I began to bump into people in the library reading his autobiography, *Up From Slavery*, and said, “Something is going on.”

Well, what’s going on is what I want to talk about because Booker T. Washington was a sellout. He was an Uncle Tom,

which is a conservative black misleader kowtowing to white ruling-class interests. This was basic understanding on the part of any of us who became radicalized in the 1960s. But now we have to reaffirm these truths in the face of the prodigious output of lying hypocritical capitalist mouthpieces.

His rehabilitation grows out of the relative dearth of class and social struggles today, what we call a sort of one-sided class war. History is being reinvented by self-proclaimed spokesmen for the oppressed, so that yesterday’s chumps are turned into today’s champs. There’s an ongoing bourgeois campaign to rehabilitate the pro-segregationist, anti-labor, pro-imperialist legacy of Booker T. Washington. We have to defeat such reaction-

ary trends in order to politically arm the working class and its allies to wage a revolutionary struggle for the smashing of capitalist rule.

From the halls of academia to union halls to the Commander-in-Chief Obama, Washington is being touted as some kind of spokesman for black freedom. This is a gross falsification of history in the service of reconciling the oppressed with their oppressors. Bound up with this falsification is a new reality of the first black president of the U.S., Barack Obama. This is supposed to mean, according to what he stated, that black people are 90 percent free. I don’t know how you can be 90 percent free! We oppose on principle any support to capitalist parties—Democrats, Republicans and Greens. The capitalist



Yale Collection

Booker T. Washington and President Theodore Roosevelt at Tuskegee Institute, October 1905.

system cannot be reformed but must be smashed by proletarian revolution.

Tuskegee: Training for Industrial Slavery

Washington was called by some the "Black Moses." He was born in 1856 in Franklin County, Virginia, to a slave mother and a white father whom he never knew. His name is synonymous with the Tuskegee Institute—a school to train black men and women in menial labor and instill an ethic of so-called self-help. He presided over Tuskegee from 1881 to his death in 1915.

His stepfather relocated his family to a mining town. Eventually the young Booker briefly became a miner, around the age of 12. He didn't like that very much. He worked in a salt mine, hard work. Eventually he found work for a well-to-do white family in a job that inculcated in him the importance of understanding hard work and cleanliness and above all the toothbrush, which is what he lectured a lot of the Tuskegee students about. The toothbrush.

According to Washington, the most important person who shaped him was a man named General Samuel Chapman Armstrong. Armstrong was born and raised in Hawaii. He was the son of educational missionaries who worked to "civilize" indigenous Hawaiians. He was also a commander of a black regiment during the Civil War.

After the Civil War, Armstrong became a superintendent in the Virginia Freedmen's Bureau, which in a limited way sought to ameliorate the desperate plight of the black freedmen. His perspective was that he had to do something to teach

the black freedmen what the dignity of labor is. He was considered ideal to teach black people because of his Civil War experience. So after he left the Freedmen's Bureau he applied the colonialist-inspired training in Hawaii that he acquired at an early age to set up the Hampton "school" in West Virginia. Some called this less a school and more like a church and army barracks. Hampton was geared to teaching black Southerners to "stay in their place"—menial labor.

Black women were taught cooking, cleaning, dusting. Maybe for two hours at the end of the day people got a chance to study the Three R's. One biographer of Armstrong wrote:

"The General thought of blacks primarily in terms of what they could contribute to the economic prosperity of the country. In harmony with the racial economics of his age, Armstrong considered blacks to be inferior, barbaric, and ugly creatures—with a 'facial angle,' 'thicker cranium,' 'two inch longer arm,' and 'color of skin' that were all repulsive, but 'no barrier to industry'."

—Donald Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery* (1978)

He looked at it in terms of how they could serve and build prosperity for Southern and Northern industrialists. Two years before he died in 1893, Armstrong made it clear that he was never dreaming of "social equality."

His views were in accordance with the viciously racist ideology of his time, promulgated especially at the end of the 19th century. There were a lot of so-called scholars preaching pseudoscientific racism to prove "black inferiority" and "white superiority." Also, there were others who were predicting the ultimate extinction of the black race.

Washington's Tuskegee Institute in Alabama was modeled after Hampton. It was a drilling ground for non-union, menial agricultural labor. And as I pointed out, there was very little of teaching the basics going on. Religious service was mandatory and every person had a seat, so you didn't get out of it. Tuskegee was really a school, as one fellow called it, for industrial slavery in the "New South" of the time.

Washington's program of self-help, pull yourself up by your bootstraps and black capitalism is a renunciation of a fight for black equality and acceptance of racist segregation. It had influence on an assortment of black nationalist organizations and leaders over the years, such as Marcus Garvey, who from Jamaica was following closely the work of the Tuskegee Institute. One reason he emigrated to the U.S. was to meet and study under Washington, but Washington died shortly before he arrived. The Nation of Islam is another organization which stands in that tradition.

Washington's reactionary program was translated on the streets of Washington, D.C., in 1995. The Nation of Islam, led by the reactionary nationalist, anti-Semitic demagogue Louis Farrakhan (the same man who wanted Malcolm X dead) staged his Million Man March. This was a reactionary mobilization of the oppressed that was also directed against women, especially black women. This is the program that blames black people for their own oppression. And it was no accident that then-president Bill Clinton even gave it a nod of approval.

For Revolutionary Integrationism!

As revolutionary Marxists, the Spartacist League fights for the class-struggle program of revolutionary integration: championing struggles for black equality while emphasizing that the liberation of black people from color-caste oppression can be achieved only in an egalitarian socialist society. Any serious struggle for black liberation in racist capitalist America has revolutionary implications. Linked to the power of the integrated labor movement, it is a potential dagger aimed straight at the heart of the capitalist private property system, which is the source of the special oppression of black people.

Our program is directly counterposed to the dead-end program of liberal integrationism—represented by the "respectable," legalistic organizations such as the NAACP—and black separatism. The program of the former is based upon step-at-a-time gradualism, preaching mainly reliance on the capitalist courts for justice. The black separatists despair of the possi-

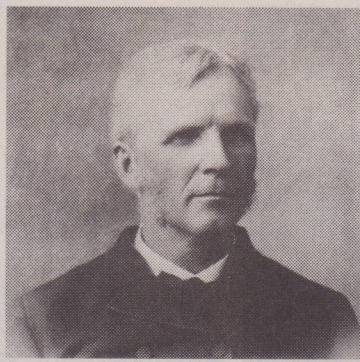
bility of mobilizing the multiracial working class to fight for black freedom. They both defend the capitalist system against the exploited and oppressed. There can be no separate road to black liberation. It is in the interest of the working class to fight for black freedom, which is an inseparable part of the struggle for abolishing the system of capitalist exploitation through socialist revolution.

The period of history we are living in right now remains the epoch of imperialist decay. The Bolshevik revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky pointed out that in periods of gigantic defeats for the proletariat, consciousness regresses to previous epochs, to pre-Marxist ideas. Such is the case today, two decades after capitalist counterrevolution in the former Soviet Union and East Europe, as reflected by the rehabilitation of bourgeois scoundrels such as the arch-reactionary black capitalist political spokesman Booker T. Washington. You see it also with the ghosts of the Confederacy, like in Brooklyn on Memorial Day last year, when they lauded some Confederate soldier buried in Green-Wood Cemetery.

The tumultuous struggles of the civil rights movement, which challenged the anti-Communist Cold War consensus, resulted in the destruction of Jim Crow legalized segregation. However, that movement was derailed by the pro-capitalist program of its liberal leadership—ranging from King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference to Roy Wilkins' NAACP—which counseled reliance on the Democrats, the federal government and the courts. When the civil rights movement moved North, it ran into the solid core of racist American capitalism, manifested by dilapidated housing and schools, rampant cop brutality, entrenched unemployment. The liberals were incapable of addressing the material roots of black oppression because above all they sought to keep that struggle within the bounds of capitalism.

Busing for school integration in the mid 1970s was knifed in the back by liberal Democrats and the reformists, such as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and Workers World's Youth Against War and Fascism, who tailed them. The reformists' reliance on Democratic politicians and the bourgeois state—for example, the SWP's call for federal troops to Boston—facilitated the defeat of school integration by very well-organized and deadly anti-busing forces.

A searing symbol of the virulent racist anti-busing backlash was a famous photograph of a black lawyer in Boston being speared with a flag pole with the American flag on it, wielded by racists. We fought for the independent mobiliza-



Washington's mentor General Samuel Chapman Armstrong (left) considered black people inferior, founded Hampton Institute (below) to train black Southerners in menial labor.

Frances Benjamin Johnston photos



tion of labor to fight for elementary democratic rights for black people. We fought for labor-black defense guards to defend the black schoolchildren and for extending busing to the suburbs, where there undoubtedly existed better schools. Busing was no cure-all, no panacea, but we defended it because it was a partial step toward black equality.

Historically, when black people have perceived an opening for integration, they have fought for it. For some years after the defeat of school integration in Boston and elsewhere, battles were still being fought out in the South. In May 1983, a 10,000-strong march in Norfolk, Virginia, to defend busing had a significant component of black ILA longshoremen. Ex-civil rights leader Jesse Jackson conveyed to those assembled there that he came to march not for desegregation but for voter registration, that is, for the Democrats. Jackson's Operation PUSH organization wanted "integration" all right: into the boardrooms of Wall Street and petty capitalist enterprises.

The reformist left—the International Socialist Organization, Workers World and others—lie that the pro-Democratic Party liberal Martin Luther King was becoming a revolutionary toward the end of his life. Today this myth is standard fare. It's preposterous on a number of levels. You don't have to know everything about King's political history to see through this bull, but you do know that you don't get to have a monument in Washington, D.C., unless you have played a part in helping the oppressors to keep the oppressed in line.

The black liberal ideologue (and peren-

nial talking head) Michael Eric Dyson recently wrote that "Martin Luther King, Jr., ten days before he died, said before the Rabbinical Assembly of America that black people ought to practice 'temporary segregation' unless we're going to be 'integrated out of power.'" Now, Dyson described this in positive terms as a "complex form of solidarity." What we've got to deal with!

Obama Trumpets Booker T. Washington

Today there is hardly a pretense of any struggle for integration. In 1954, the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that outlawed segregation in the schools had a qualifier attached to it: "with all deliberate speed." This was a signal to the racists—so-called states' righters—that they could undermine it and sabotage it at will. In 2007, the Supreme Court threw out school desegregation plans in Seattle and Louisville, giving the green light to those seeking to overturn some 1,000 school integration plans across the country. As we pointed out in "Supreme Court: Segregation Forever" (WV No. 895, 6 July 2007): "In eviscerating the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling that banned school segregation, the Court majority in essence turned the clock back over a hundred years to the infamous 1896 'separate but equal' *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling—a cornerstone of the racist Jim Crow system."

Petty-bourgeois ideologues spread the lie that integration failed despite huge resources expended on it. There were never significant resources devoted to integrating housing or education. What



Forman/Boston Herald American



WV Photo

Left: Racist anti-busing mob in Boston attacks black lawyer Ted Landsmark, 1976. Right: Spartacist contingent at 1974 demonstration calls for labor/black mobilizations to stop racist attacks on busing for school integration.

is promoted instead by the bourgeois liberals is the charade of "diversity," which disguises the perpetuation of the racist status quo. That's why we are being served up "separate but equal" poison by the rulers and their ideologues.

Now I'm going to return to Booker T. Washington, beginning with a statement attributed to the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin. When he heard that black Americans were led by a conservative leader, he reportedly roared with laughter. What on earth, he exclaimed, have they to conserve?

Obama in a May 2011 commencement speech at Booker T. Washington High School in Memphis, Tennessee, stated that Washington "entered this world a slave on a Southern plantation. But he would leave this world as the leader of a growing civil rights movement and the president of the world famous Tuskegee Institute." Had anyone made such a claim to Booker T. Washington during his lifetime, he probably would have sued for defamation. In *Up From Slavery*, he excoriated black freedmen who, he said, during Reconstruction sought a too-rapid improvement in their lives. He also denounced them for what he portrayed as their general uncouthness.

It was the hard struggles of the black freedmen and women during Reconstruction, in alliance with the Radical Republicans, that led to the establishment of public education for the black and white poor. The bourgeoisie today is trying to destroy that. With the escalating bipartisan attacks on public education, teachers unions are under attack, and there is a concomitant growth of charter schools.

The comment by Obama that I quoted deliberately distorts the historical record. He is invoking the legacy of a capitalist politician who became an effective spokesman for the interests of the U.S. ruling class in the period of the rise of

U.S. imperialism, at the end of the 19th century. Today, in the period of the decay of this system, Wall Street money sharks cleverly promoted to the presidency a black man (but not too black) to be the CEO of their system.

Like Booker T. Washington, Obama lost no time in showing how he can "keep black people in their place." For example, on Father's Day, June 15, 2008, he addressed a black church in Chicago, stating that "in the African American community... more than half of all black children live in single-parent households," and "too many fathers [are] missing from too many lives and too many homes.... These absent black fathers have abandoned their responsibilities, acting more like boys instead of men." Saying "acting like boys" in the past would have been fighting words. Blaming the oppressed for their oppression is beating them down, convincing them that they are the source of their own problems.

The Jim Crow South

The Trotskyists of the Workers Party U.S., our revolutionary forerunners, ran an article titled "Booker T. Washington—He Pleased the Bourgeoisie" in the *New Militant* (2 February 1935). They put forth a Marxist appraisal of this "leader":

"In speaking once of social equality for Negroes, Washington said: 'In things industrial we can be as close as one, but in things social as separate as the fingers on the hands.'

"This pleased his white financial masters and they covered him with additional honor and glory in the form of more endowments for his institution. They well knew that so long as such ideas were shoved down the throats of the Negro and white workers there would be little danger of unity and their position as robbers of the American workers, would be secure."

The veteran Trotskyist Richard Fraser,

whose programmatic contributions on the black question we embrace, stated in his lectures in 1954, titled "The Negro Struggle and the Proletarian Revolution":

"The economic well-being and the political stability of the capitalist class rest upon the renewed degradation of the Negro people after the Civil War.

"It was this degradation that brought forth Booker T. Washington. He was the instrument by which the Negroes acceded to the terms of defeat."

—printed in the Prometheus Research Library's

In Memoriam: Richard S. Fraser, Prometheus Research Series No. 3 (August 1990)

Fraser pointed out that in his famous Atlanta speech in 1895, Washington formally renounced the struggle for equality.

In pursuit of their class interests, the Northern capitalists betrayed the fight for black equality following the Civil War. The Compromise of 1877, which settled a disputed election, placed the Republican Rutherford B. Hayes in the White House in exchange for pulling the Federal troops—the occupying Union Army—from the South. The Northern capitalists feared an alliance between the Southern planters and agrarian interests in the West and temporarily backed voting and civil rights for the black freedmen. However, the Radical Republicans' demand for land confiscation ran counter to the bourgeoisie's class interests. The more conservative Republicans opposed this as a dangerous precedent that would perhaps put some wrong ideas in the heads of their wage slaves in the North, who might get rid of the "sacred" capitalist private property system.

Through Klan terror, intimidation, fraud and disenfranchisement, the Northern capitalists and their Southern allies "reconciled." The political counterrevolution brought to power what became known

Obama and the Ex-Klansman

We print below the remarks of a comrade at the New York forum on Booker T. Washington.

Many people we talk to tell us they will vote for Obama in opposition to the openly racist Republican candidates. But a vote for this capitalist politician is a vote *against* the emancipation of the working class. A vote for Obama is a vote *against* black freedom and equality.

This forum on the rehabilitation of Booker T. Washington reminded me of a speech Obama gave at the funeral of Democratic Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia in July of 2010. Senator Byrd was a former leader of the KKK, later an arch-segregationist who unsuccessfully filibustered the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Senator Byrd's endorsement of Obama for president was crucial to his 2008 campaign's effort to prove to the bourgeoisie that he was a safe bet for their class interests.

So Obama gave a speech at Senator Byrd's funeral in 2010. After making a coy reference to the things this ex-Klan leader "said and things he did that he

came to regret," Obama went on to say, "Robert Byrd was a mountain eagle and his lowest swoop was still higher than the other birds upon the plain." That was Obama's tribute, quoted in the *Washington Post* online.

Racist terrorists like the KKK are not ancient history. The Spartacist League has organized protests aimed at stopping fascist terrorists, who pose a deadly threat against the working class. We look to the power of labor to do this, not the capitalist state. One of these mobilizations we organized was in Springfield, Illinois, in 1994 and hundreds of trade unionists, students and others took part. It was just prior to this rally that our party had our first and possibly only interaction with Obama.

We invited people we were very much in political disagreement with to endorse our united-front demonstration. Our call to stop the Klan touched a nerve with pro-capitalist trade-union bureaucrats and even black Democratic politicians like Emil Jones, and many of them endorsed our united front. After we got Emil Jones's

endorsement, one of our comrades in Chicago called up Emil Jones's protégée, Barack Obama. Obama refused to endorse the mobilization to stop the Klan from marching in Springfield.

All of this transpired in December 1993-January 1994, before Barack Obama became an Illinois state senator, U.S. Senator, and then Commander-in-Chief of U.S. imperialism. Now he's a war criminal like the presidents who came before him, with the blood of many thousands of Afghanis, Iraqis, Libyans and Pakistanis on his hands. Now he has many notches in his belt, like the deportation of 1,000,000 immigrants, the union-busting bailout of the auto industry, and legalizing the indefinite military detention of U.S. citizens.

The Spartacist League has a program to fight against imperialism, racial oppression and the exploitation of the multiracial working class. Don't vote for your class enemies in the Democratic Party. Join us in the struggle to build a workers party that will fight for socialist revolution.

as the Redeemer governments supported by Northern capital. The freedmen were pushed out of skilled jobs they previously held and forced into conditions of semi-servitude through debt peonage, sharecropping and convict leasing (now referred to as "slavery by another name"). Between 1885 and 1900, 2,500 lynchings, mostly of black people, occurred in the United States. This led Mark Twain to write an essay titled "The United States of Lyncherdom."

There was a long depression during the 1890s and also bitterly fought labor struggles throughout the South, including a protracted strike in 1894 of black and white coal miners in Alabama. The Knights of Labor undertook organizing black workers into unions, with mixed results. Initially they stood against racial discrimination in the unions. But they were overwhelmed by, and capitulated to, the galloping white-supremacist reaction, eventually allowing separate charters for the black Knights of Labor members.

There was also a Populist revolt against "the monopolists" and for the "little people." During this period, nearly a quarter of ex-slaves had farms, and many white farmers were being ruined and driven to join with their black counterparts. There was a tentative union between black and white farmers, but it was ultimately doomed to failure.

One of the main Populist leaders was

Tom Watson of Georgia, a former Democrat. Watson and the Populists won support from poor black and white farmers and sharecroppers, not just on isolated farms but also in what was known as Alabama's "Black Belt" industrial area. This caught the attention of then-president Grover Cleveland. The prospect of joint class struggle against the capitalist exploiters scared the hell out of them. Big Business mobilized to smash the Populists. When Watson ran for Congress in 1892 on the Populist ticket, the capitalists and Southern planters raised \$40,000 to defeat him, a considerable sum at that time. President Cleveland remarked that defeating Watson was just as important as his own election. After he was defeated, Watson became a vile white-supremacist demagogue.

As we stated in our programmatic document on the fight for black liberation, "Black and Red" (reprinted in *Marxist Bulletin* No. 9, "Basic Documents of the Spartacist League"): "The small farmer class itself could not be a real contender for political power in a capitalist society, while the dynamics of private farming inevitably brought about sharp competition among the farmers." With the bloody defeat of Populism and the overturning of democratic rights for blacks, the stage was set for the subsequent rapid disenfranchisement of black people and poor whites and the codification of Jim Crow

segregation. That resulted in the total consolidation of black people as a race-color caste, integrated into the U.S. capitalist economy but forcibly segregated at the bottom of society.

Policing Southern Black Labor

After the defeat of the Populists, Southern capitalists and planters and especially the wealthy Northern capitalists began to seriously cultivate Booker T. Washington. His philosophy of "industrial education" was bound up with his anti-union message. He stressed the importance of staying in your place and not struggling for your rights. Speaking to a convention of industrialists in Alabama in the late 1890s, he said: "It is here alone, by reason of the presence of the Negro, that capital is freed from the tyranny and despotism that prevents you from employing whom you please." What he meant was seen at Tuskegee, where some of the graduates—for example, teachers and social workers—were enlisted to preach subservience to the bosses. They were sent to mining areas and other workplaces to exhort black workers to work harder, to obey management, to avoid unions and to stick with the church.

Some workers were not listening. One report stated, "A Birmingham camp physician noted in 1907 that 'the churches wield only a limited influence' over the



Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center

September 1906: At least two dozen black people were killed and thousands driven from their homes during racist pogrom in Atlanta.

lives of black miners, who 'make no pretense toward being religious, even tho [sic] moral'."

White bosses sent Booker T. Washington twice to Norfolk, Virginia, to help police black workers. The bosses threatened to hire immigrant labor. Washington was an enemy of immigrant workers. In his Atlanta address of 1895, he railed against them: "To those of the white race who look to the incoming of those of foreign birth and strange tongue and habits for the prosperity of the South, were I permitted I would repeat what I say to my own race, 'cast down your bucket where you are'."

As labor historian Brian Kelly noted in "Sentinels for New South Industry" (*Labor History*, Vol. 44, No. 3, 2003): "Employers frustrated with their lack of success in anchoring black workers to steady, full-time industrial labor frequently solicited race leaders' advice, and many responded enthusiastically." Washington spoke on at least two occasions to orchestrated mass meetings at the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company, one of the largest employers of black industrial labor in the South. He reportedly exhorted workers to "stick to their jobs and, instead of recklessly and foolishly spending their good wages, build better homes and churches."

Booker T. Washington's imperialist masters made very good use of him. He had the ear of presidents like the "progressive" Theodore Roosevelt, who had earlier been Assistant Secretary of the Navy when U.S. imperialism was butchering Filipino independence fighters, a history which is still very well known there today.

Roosevelt got Washington's help in intro-

ducing dark-skinned Cubans to the "American Way" after the Spanish-American War of 1898. Some black Cubans attended Tuskegee. According to one account cited by Kelly: "In 1898 Washington entered an arrangement with the US military allowing matriculation of Cuban and Puerto Rican students at Tuskegee Institute. Some among them led a series of strikes and mini-rebellions at Tuskegee over complaints about food and prohibitions against their playing baseball on Sundays." Largely because of these students, "the school had to construct a guardhouse. The Cubans refused to eat...and struck against their work. When a teacher and a student tried to put [one of their leaders] in jail, his compatriots jumped them, but they succeeded in making the arrest. Guns were flourished before order was restored." Black American students also staged a brief strike there in 1903; it didn't last very long.

Washington's Black Critics

The early 20th century was known as the Progressive Era, with mild liberal reforms which, of course, didn't touch the foundations of the capitalist system. There was a small but vocal coterie of black critics of Washington's "bootstraps" philosophy. One of the most outspoken was black journalist Monroe Trotter, who resided in Boston and was close friends with W.E.B. Du Bois. Trotter was jailed in 1903 for "disturbing the peace" during a speech Washington gave there. Washington had his spies very busy trying to ferret out opponents who might show up. Washington supporters had a hard time restraining the hecklers and maintaining order. After Trotter tried to speak, it got

into the white and black newspapers for the first time that there was a black opposition to Washington's accommodationist program.

W.E.B. Du Bois was one of the most prominent critics of Washington in the early 20th century. Du Bois criticized Washington for abandoning any struggle for political and civil rights. Du Bois envisioned a "talented tenth" leadership of college-educated blacks who were presumably uniquely equipped to lead the black masses in struggles for higher education, political power and basic democratic rights. Du Bois didn't reject everything favored by Washington. He stated in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*: "So far as Mr. Washington preaches Thrift, Patience, and Industrial training for the masses, we must hold up his hands and strive with him." In fact, they were friends for a while.

In 1903, Du Bois taught summer school at Tuskegee and he regularly dined with Washington. But when Du Bois came out with his book criticizing his leadership, Washington took off the gloves. Unknown to the public, Washington had behind the scenes funded a number of black newspapers. He made sure that Du Bois' book would get unfavorable reviews. In 1904, Washington organized a meeting of black "notables"—Du Bois was invited—at Carnegie Hall. Du Bois got there and saw that Washington had all his Bookerites there. He was outmaneuvered. They set up some committee called the "Committee of 12" that was elected to pursue "progress" for blacks, and it disappeared into the mist of do-nothingness.

In 1905, Du Bois was one of the initiators of the Niagara movement. This eventually led to the creation of the NAACP, which was initially led by reformist social democrats. Oswald Garrison Villard, grandson of the white abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison (who represented the "moral suasion" wing of the abolitionist movement), was one of its leading forces.

Washington faced some severe trials in 1906. There was the anti-black pogrom in Atlanta that began on September 22. It lasted for five days. Lynch mobs pulled black passengers from streetcars, destroyed black businesses. Thousands of black people were driven out of Atlanta. The Atlanta newspapers fanned the flames. They printed unsubstantiated rumors of black men raping white women. There was also a gubernatorial campaign going on in which the candidates seized on the racist outcry of "black beast rapists." A couple of dozen black people were killed during this pogrom (some estimates were a lot more), and five whites were also killed.

Washington gave a back-handed defense of the lynching; he viewed lynching in class terms—the “better” whites didn’t do that. Washington’s National Negro Business League had met in Atlanta three weeks before this racist pogrom. In his speech at that convention he stated, “The Negro is committing too much crime North and South. We should see to it, as far as our influence extends, that crimes are fewer in number; otherwise the race will permanently suffer.” So he blamed the victims for their oppression, and the bosses’ papers just ate it up. In commenting on this speech, the *Atlanta Constitution* ran an incendiary headline: “Law-Breaking Negroes Worst Menace to Race.”

At the time of the pogrom, Du Bois, who had been away in rural Alabama, quickly returned home to Atlanta. He grabbed his shotgun and waited. He was lucky that things had died down. Some of Washington’s supporters, like the journalist T. Thomas Fortune, advocated armed self-defense, but Washington did not want to hear anything about that.

There was another atrocity in 1906, in Brownsville on the southernmost tip of Texas, near the Mexican border. Just to give you a brief synopsis, from a new biography of Washington:

“On the evening of August 13, 1906, a band of unidentified men opened fire on the streets of Brownsville near Fort Brown, where three companies of black soldiers of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry regiment had been moved from their previous post in Nebraska. A bartender was killed and a policeman badly wounded. Just who was responsible for the incident was never proven. But townspeople who resented black soldiers in their midst blamed a dozen members of the black regiment for the shooting, even though

the commander of the fort said all men were accounted for at the time. The twelve accused soldiers were imprisoned. The remainder of the regiment, 155 men, remained silent when asked what they knew of the incident. After several cursory investigations the entire regiment of 167 men was charged with insubordination, with the recommendation that they be dishonorably discharged.”

—Raymond W. Smock, *Black Leadership in the Age of Jim Crow* (2009)

The case went to Roosevelt for review. He waited until after the November 1906 elections to make a final decision on the black soldiers’ dismissal. He needed the black vote at the time for the Congressional elections, so he temporized. Washington implored him to discharge *some* of the regiments. Roosevelt refused to heed his advice. Many career soldiers with distinguished records in the Army were thrown out of the service. They lost their pay, pensions and possibility of obtaining future jobs with the federal government. Washington’s closest friends unsuccessfully urged him to break with Roosevelt.

Black women such as anti-lynching fighter Ida B. Wells were especially sharp critics of Washington’s accommodationism. Wells drew out the reactionary underpinnings of Washington’s program and his gibes against college-educated blacks: “The result is that the world which listens to him and which largely supports his educational institution, has almost unanimously decided that college education is a mistake for the Negro.”

Reviving Washington in the Obama Years

Anti-integration, pro-Booker T. Washington sentiments are increasingly expressed by younger (and not so young)

pro-Democratic Party, pro-Obama liberal academics as well as celebrities like Bill Cosby, Juan Williams and many others. A good place to start is a recent book by Stephen Tuck, an Oxford University lecturer in American History, titled *We Ain’t What We Ought To Be* (2010), which has been well received by many “radical” academics, such as Robin Kelley.

Tuck notes that “Washington dismissed Reconstruction as a ‘strange’ mistake. He denounced black leaders who complained about white supremacy. He then called on black southerners to stay in the South and remember that ‘no race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as writing a poem.’” In the next paragraph, Tuck suggests that Washington was a very astute leader:

“Washington’s silences were strategic. He believed that if black southerners could not have the democracy part of the American system, they should at least seek the capitalist part. With some three-fourths of black Southerners barely eking out a living on the land, he judged the capitalist part more pressing anyway.... With no state help on offer, self-help made sense.”

Juan Williams wrote a book whose title speaks volumes about the program of latter-day Booker T. Washington, pro-capitalist, accommodationist thought: *Enough: The Phony Leaders, Dead-End Movements, and Culture of Failure That Are Undermining Black America—and What We Can Do About It* (2006). This book both defends Washington and slanders his critics, remarking: “Black leaders of all ideological stripes agreed that the key to racial progress was black people helping themselves.”

Christopher Alan Bracey, a professor of law and of African and African American



Donald Duster Collection



William Loren Katz Collection

Left: Ida B. Wells, anti-lynching fighter and critic of Washington. Right: 1917 march in New York City protested national wave of lynchings by race-terrorist KKK.



Alabama Department of Archives and History

Thousands of black and white miners march on Red Diamond mine during Alabama coal strike of 1908.

Studies at Washington University in St. Louis, wrote an interesting book, *Saviors or Sellouts: The Promise and Peril of Black Conservatism from Booker T. Washington to Condoleezza Rice* (2008). Bracey seeks to shield Washington from his actual support for white supremacy, for which Washington was handsomely rewarded. Filthy rich capitalist Andrew Carnegie gave Washington and his wife lifetime income.

Bracey rails against the "black conservatives," but he excuses their support to capitalism and covers for Washington's

reactionary program. At the end of this book, he says:

"It would be a mistake to conclude, however, that Washington's eschewal of an open civil rights agenda and promotion of industrial education marked him as a 'sellout.' To some degree, it was simply a matter of emphasis. For instance, although Washington encouraged blacks to stay out of politics, he strongly opposed black disenfranchisement behind the scenes and privately financed 'test cases' in many southern states to challenge the constitutionality of restrictive voting laws. Though Washington supported literacy tests for voters, he publicly urged that such tests be applied fairly, and he signed petitions to state legislatures to oppose bills that would disenfranchise blacks unfairly."

One is tempted to ask Professor Bracey: Should we then embrace the legacy of the deceased rabid segregationist South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond, who fathered a child with a black woman, because he "secretly" provided his daughter with financial support?

Former New Left radicals such as Earl Ofari Hutchinson, who once denounced Booker T. Washington, now praise him for having done a "masterful job." In 1970, Ofari wrote *The Myth of Black Capitalism*, which among other things sharply criticized Booker T. Washington's utopian "black capitalism." At that time, he stated:

"That many so-called black leaders should waste black people's valuable time and energy chasing another of the American ruling class's myths is understandable *but it is inexcusable*. For black Americans have the opportunity today as never before to learn from the experiences of the many sincere genuine revolutionary people throughout the world."

Now, without acknowledging his con-

demnation of Washington in the past, he belts this out:

"To understand the whole person, you have to put him in the context of the time he lived and worked.... Washington was embraced by Northern philanthropists. The Carnegies, the Rockefellers, the Rosenwalds poured money into his programs and essentially subsidized Booker T. Washington. Given that endorsement, could he really have stepped outside that and said, 'Look, segregation is wrong. We are going to march; we're going to demonstrate, picket, and protest—use every means of political and social protest.'... Could he have challenged the philanthropists, none of whom were for black civil rights back then?... If he had spoken out, he'd have been buried."

—*Uncle Tom or New Negro?* (2006)

The late Manning Marable wrote a book in 1998 called *Black Leadership*. He pointed out Washington's support to strikebreaking during the bitterly fought 1908 Alabama coal miners strike. The Alabama United Mineworkers Union had 12,000 members, half of them black miners. After U.S. Steel refused to renew the workers' contracts and ordered substantial wage cuts, the miners announced a strike. The Alabama state government sent in convicts to scab. The strikers faced ruthless attacks from police, company goons and state militia. Many of their leaders were imprisoned. Marable notes that Washington made clear *his* side in this bloody class battle: "Negroes must not be 'given to strikes,' he declared. The collective bargaining process of unionism must be avoided as 'a form of slavery.'"

The Need for Revolutionary Leadership

The rulers of racist American capitalism continue to be haunted by the Civil War. It took a social revolution to uproot black chattel slavery. It will take a third American revolution, a workers revolution, to finish the Civil War.

In addition to naked force, the bourgeoisie requires deception in order to maintain its class rule. Recently you might have seen in the press a "scholarly" paper published by the creepy Manhattan Institute called the "End of the Segregated Century." And as for more deception, Obama asserted in his January State of the Union address that "America is back." One obvious question is: back for whom?

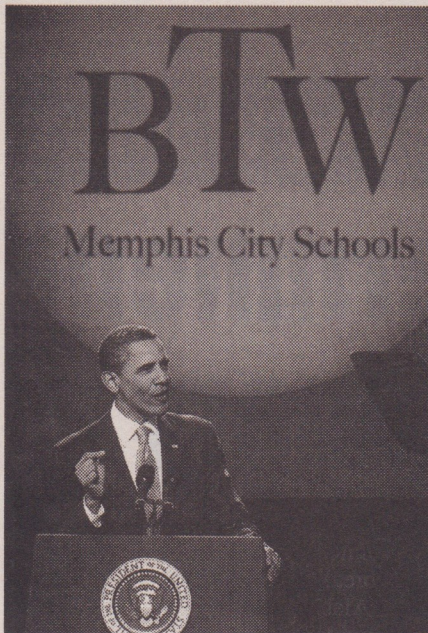
The downturn of this capitalist economy continues. Manufacturing is slowing. It's the same old story: profits rise and the proletariat falls. In the U.S., some 50 million people don't have health insurance, 10-20 million are unemployed or underemployed, the homeless population is exploding and the jails and prisons bursting at the seams. Police killings of black and Latino youth mount, and a record

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Chicago Tribune

Left: Obama speaking at Booker T. Washington High School in Memphis, Tennessee, trumpeted Washington's program of self-help, May 2011. Right: Families line up in Chicago for food and toys, Christmas Eve 2010.

number of immigrants, largely Mexican, have been deported. And now there is a vicious bipartisan assault against women's rights to have an abortion and access to contraceptives. Obama, who pretends that he's on the side of women, panders to the anti-abortion bigots.

The Republicans are openly pro-big business. They use brass knuckles to pound into the ground the exploited and the oppressed. The Democrats—the so-

called "friends of labor"—administer their blows with steel pipes wrapped in perfumed velvet gloves. So pick your poison—or better yet, don't swallow it!

What we see today is the reality elaborated by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*, that the government is an executive committee that runs the common affairs of the bourgeoisie. There is a small number of people constituting the property-owning class, which exploits the

masses of working people. Abroad, U.S. imperialism murders and maims countless people with impunity. It is in the interest of the American and international proletariat to wage class struggle against their respective capitalist rulers, against imperialist occupations and wars.

We urgently need militant, integrated class struggle—for jobs for all; for a shorter workweek with no cut in pay; for massive public works at union wages; for organizing the unorganized. There has to be a fight to replace the pro-capitalist misleadership of labor with a class-struggle leadership. We need a workers party to fight for a workers government that will expropriate the capitalist exploiters. We say that those who labor must rule!

Key to this is the fight to reforge the Fourth International—an internationalist revolutionary party in the spirit of Lenin and Trotsky's Bolsheviks, who led the only successful workers revolution in history, the October Revolution of 1917. I want to end with a short quote from Lenin, who wrote to the American workers in 1919 as the Soviet regime was facing down counterrevolutionary forces trying to overthrow the newly formed workers state:

"Everywhere the working people, in spite of the influence of the old leaders with their chauvinism and opportunism penetrating them through and through, become aware of the rottenness of the bourgeois parliaments and of the necessity of the Soviet power, the power of the working people, the dictatorship of the proletariat, for the sake of the emancipation of humanity from the yoke of capital. And Soviet power will win in the whole world, however furiously, however frantically the bourgeoisie of all countries rages and storms."

—"To the American Workers"
(23 September 1919) ■

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Traditional Courts Bill: Dire Threat to Women

South African Government Promotes Reactionary Tribal Leaders

The following article originally appeared in Spartacist South Africa No. 9 (Winter 2013), newspaper of the South African section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist).

In December 2011, the government introduced a new Traditional Courts Bill. The bill would give traditional leaders, headed by tribal chiefs, unchallenged legal power over 17 million rural black inhabitants, who are balkanised according to tribal background along the same

SPARTACIST SOUTH AFRICA

lines promoted under apartheid. Chiefs would get increased powers to make laws, decide cases and hand down punishment—including evictions and forced unpaid labour—often with no possibility for appeal.

The biggest losers under this bill are black women, the “slaves of the slaves,” who already suffer from grinding poverty and triple oppression. Backward traditional practices oppressive to women are widespread—from *lobola* [bride price], forced polygamy and *ukuthwala* (marriage by capture) to virginity testing, all of which are reinforced by the traditional leaders. Women are commonly denied the right to represent themselves in the traditional courts, and forced to be represented by their husbands or other male family members.

After the bourgeois parliament discussed the Traditional Courts Bill in late 2012, misinformation reports were spread by the ANC [African National Congress] and the government saying that the bill had been withdrawn. This method is commonly used to defuse anger against particularly unpopular new laws (similar



GCIS

South African president Jacob Zuma accompanies tribal chiefs at National House of Traditional Leaders, November 2012.

tricks were tried with the Protection of State Information Bill, which has now been passed). The fact is that the Traditional Courts Bill is now being reviewed by the provincial governments and pushing it through is still very much on the agenda of the ANC/SACP/COSATU [ANC/South African Communist Party/Congress of South African Trade Unions] Tripartite Alliance government.

The bill is part of the increased state repression which has been deployed in response to mounting social unrest. In order to administer the neo-apartheid capitalist system, the leaders of the Alliance are compelled to reach for the same weapons that were previously used by their own apartheid butchers. The government led by President Jacob Zuma, in

particular, has relied on stoking poisonous tribal sentiments and anti-immigrant chauvinism, while sharpening the most repressive tools of the state—massacres of strikers, police brutality, de facto states of emergency, etc. The strengthening of the chiefs, tribal divisions, and traditional backwardness is part of the package of neo-apartheid rule.

The bill also underlines the lesson that national liberation struggles led by petty-bourgeois and bourgeois nationalists are incapable of ensuring real and lasting rights for women. Throughout its 101-year history, the programme and policies of the ANC have been guided by the basic aim of fostering a black capitalist layer which could participate in exploiting “its own people”—a task which they did not

want to leave solely to the white and foreign capitalists. The interpenetration of the ANC leadership with the chiefs and other traditional leaders has been a key part of this programme, and a clear indicator that this party represents the class enemy of the liberation of workers, women, and the oppressed black majority in general.

Just look at Mandla Mandela, a grandson of Nelson Mandela and ANC member of parliament. As chief of the Mvezo traditional council in the Eastern Cape, he has become notorious for using this position to enrich his family and suppress criticism or challenges, all the while promoting the most hideous backwardness to shore up his despotic reign. For example, in 2010 he officially defended the barbaric "culture" of kidnapping women (particularly young girls) known as *ukuthwala*, telling a parliamentary committee on rural development and land reform, "for a girl to be taken as a wife through *ukuthwala*—the process has nothing to do with age—When you are going to discuss culture do not even try to bring in white notions as such an approach will turn things upside down." In 2011, three of Mandla Mandela's "subjects" in Mvezo took him to court after he ordered their eviction from their ancestral gravesite to make way for capitalist developers to build a hotel and stadium.

Bourgeois-nationalist ideology has always relegated women to being "baby-makers" and servants of men. The capitalists and their lackeys are the enemies of women's liberation. As revolutionary Marxists, atheists and fighters for women's liberation, we fiercely oppose the Traditional Courts Bill. We seek to link the fight against this reactionary bill to the necessary broader struggle against the whole system of capitalist exploitation. The struggle for women's liberation is inseparable



ZUMA Press

Women carrying roofing thatch in KwaZulu-Natal, 2006. Enshrining power of tribal chiefs further reinforces social oppression and backwardness.

from the struggle for socialist revolution, and both require a fight to break the working class from the influence of bourgeois nationalism as part of forging a Leninist party to act as a tribune of the people. The working class as a whole has a vital interest in stopping this reactionary bill, which will also be used to further clamp down on any struggle against the neo-apartheid capitalist order.

Tribal Chiefs: Tools of Racist Capitalist Oppression

Life in the former bantustans is hell for the black masses, especially women, and the traditional leaders play a central role enforcing this misery and keeping the population in check. Research conducted by the Rural Women's Movement has uncovered cases in rural villages of KwaZulu-Natal where parents are forced

to pay R1,000 [\$100] or a cow to the tribal chief as a fine for their daughter falling pregnant out of wedlock; where traditional leaders deprive families of the "right" to bury loved ones because of such unpaid fines; and where many other instances of despotic abuse run rampant, including imposition of endless arbitrary "taxes" to fund traditional leaders' parasitic lifestyles.

One of the most brutally oppressive, backward practices perpetrated against women in the name of tradition is female genital mutilation (FGM), also known as female circumcision. It is often found alongside male circumcision in societies where cultures attempt to make sharp gender/sexual distinctions as children reach puberty, and it continues to be practiced in rural parts of South Africa, although the government does not acknowledge its existence. FGM is a heinous crime against women, which must be categorically and unconditionally opposed. In contrast, male circumcision, when performed under safe medical conditions, is a procedure that is vastly less deforming. Yet every year in South Africa, scores of young boys die as a result of botched circumcisions at traditional initiation schools. This highlights the tribal leaders' bitter hostility to Western medical advances and the cheapness of black life. This year in May, over 20 boys died in just one week in Mpumalanga province. The ANC's provincial minister for "health," Matshego Dlamini, grotesquely justified this, explaining her refusal to intervene by saying, "This is a tradition; as a woman I cannot go; if they are dead or not, it is a tradition"!

The chieftaincy is a bastion of reaction, a remnant of pre-capitalist society



Torgovnik/NY Times

June 2012: Tribal court in session in village of Manhlani.

which survived through widespread collaboration with the former colonial and apartheid rulers. Throughout Southern Africa, the chiefs fight tooth and nail to deny women abortion and other basic democratic rights. There is a large overlap between the chieftaincy and the ruling ANC. This helps the chiefs increase their power and wealth, while the chiefs in turn are an important part of repressing the rural black population and delivering them as voting cattle to the ANC.

Defending the Traditional Courts Bill during a speech to the National House of Traditional Leaders in November 2012, Zuma lashed out at black intellectuals who have been critical of the bill: "Some Africans who become too clever take a position (where) they become the most eloquent in criticising themselves about their own traditions and everything." Zuma, whose government just a few months earlier had carried out the massacre of 34 striking black mineworkers in defence of the profits of London-based Lonmin Platinum, demagogically intoned, "Let us solve African problems the African way, not the white man's way." In fact, the Traditional Courts Bill stands very much in the tradition of the white rulers—from British imperialists in the colonial period, to the Afrikaner nationalists during apartheid—who seized upon and reinforced the most retrogressive aspects of tribal and traditional culture as a means of propping up their rule and amassing profits from the blood and sweat of the black masses.

A prime example is the Native Administration Act of 1927, which created civil, divorce, appeal and high courts under control of the tribal headmen and chiefs, reinforcing and imposing tribal divisions on the black population. That act codified the minority status assigned to women by traditional customs, declaring: "A Black woman...who is a partner in a customary union and who is living with her husband, shall be deemed to be a minor and her husband shall be deemed to be her guardian." This was part of a notorious series of laws enacted by the British rulers as they went about entrenching the migrant labour system—the Masters and Servants Act, the Natives' Land Acts beginning in 1913, the Urban Areas Act, and various Pass Laws and Poll Taxes, all of which served to dispossess blacks of their land and create a pool of cheap black labour with no rights.

After coming to power in the 1948 elections, the National Party government would fine-tune this racist system and take it to new extremes under apartheid. As noted in "One Chief, One Vote: The Revival of Traditional Authorities in



AFP

August 2012: A day after police massacred striking miners at Marikana, women from surrounding shantytowns protested outside Lonmin platinum mine.

Post-Apartheid South Africa" (*African Affairs*, 1997): "The African reserves in the countryside played a crucial role in the government's efforts to establish tighter control over African labour.... In the African villages, the administration of the pass book and the running of the labour bureaux, where permits had to be annually renewed, were the responsibility of the chief."

The heart of apartheid was the migratory labour system, the reduction of South African blacks to dispossessed foreigners within their own country and the reduction of the surrounding black states to labour colonies for South Africa's mines, factories and farms. Thousands of workers, maimed for life while toiling for the white ruling class, were dumped back on the bantustans. The full brunt of this system was borne by the women relegated to the unspeakably destitute "homelands."

The migrant labour system and the superexploitation of mainly black labour remain at the foundation of the capitalist system in the "new South Africa," but now with the ANC-led Tripartite Alliance government acting as the black overseers for the still predominantly white capitalist rulers. This fact, and the role of the traditional leaders in this system, was highlighted by David van Wyk, a researcher for the Bench Marks Foundation, who noted in an interview with *Amandla!* (September 2012): "An Angloplats personnel manager told me that they're using local councillors and chiefs as recruitment officers. A woman who tells me that she went for five interviews and at each interview she was asked for sex and at each interview she refused and every time she didn't get the job. [It's like] what they said about

post-colonial Kenya, that 'contracts are signed on the thighs of women'."

As communists, we seek to eradicate the inherently racist migratory labour system. This would mean on the one hand massive investment to promote the economic and social development of the rural areas here and in neighbouring countries. It also would involve a major programme to provide quality, affordable housing for all in the cities and other areas where industry is currently concentrated, including adequate housing for workers and their families to live comfortably. The capitalists and their government are not going to do any of this, because it does not serve their class interests. What's needed is a black-centred workers government, part of a socialist federation of Southern Africa, to build a socialist planned economy in which production is organised to serve the interests of the majority rather than the profits of a filthy rich minority.

The COSATU leaders have never fundamentally challenged the migrant labour system or its counterpart, South Africa's "domestic service" for African women who have made it out of the desolation of the rural areas. This is no accident—it flows from their treacherous class-collaborationist politics, which chain the working class to the bourgeois-nationalist ANC via the Tripartite Alliance. A fight against the migrant labour system is going to take a political struggle against the class-collaborationist trade union tops.

Eradicating the migrant labour system is also intimately connected to the land question, a burning issue at the centre of the dispossession of the non-white majority. A century after the Natives' Land Act of 1913, the white minority still owns

more than 70 percent of urban and arable rural land. We are for the expropriation of the large, white-owned farms and for their transformation into collective and state farms under workers rule. Much of the remaining land in the rural areas is now under the control of the tribal chiefs as a result of the Communal Land Rights Act of 2004, which gave them control over the land of their subjects. A black-centred workers government would put an end to the privileges and power of these rural despots.

At the ANC's founding in 1912 (initially as the South African Native National Congress), a considerable number of the delegates were tribal chiefs, leading to the creation of an "Upper House" to accommodate traditional leaders who joined the organisation. Along with the intellectuals, lawyers and other representatives of the black petty-bourgeoisie who formed the ANC, the chiefs' main concern was begging the British colonial rulers to grant them a privileged position as black aristocracy within the system of white capitalist rule. For example, at the 1912 founding, one of the five basic aims outlined for the organisation was to "promote understanding between chiefs, and loyalty to the British crown and all lawful authorities and to promote understanding between white and black South Africans!"

The ANC would later adopt a more populist stance aimed at attracting mass support, exemplified by the 1955 Freedom Charter, a bourgeois-populist programme. This was in large part a result of the white rulers' refusal to grant even the most minimal concessions, instead increasing repression of any independent black political activity, including banning the ANC and other black-nationalist organisations by the early 1960s. At the same time, the apartheid rulers sought to co-opt the tribal chiefs and use them to police the black population through the hated bantustan system. For the most part, the chiefs were willing collaborators, a fact which led to significant hostility toward the chiefs among the base of the ANC-led Congress movement and other wings of the anti-apartheid movement.

Some of the sharpest expressions of this hostility occurred during the 1980s, at the same time as massive strikes by the black trade unions and township revolts rocked the country. But the ANC leaders' calls to "make the country ungovernable" were never intended to launch a struggle to overthrow the hated apartheid rulers; rather, the nationalist leaders were cynically exploiting the militancy of the masses in a bid to *pressure* the white rulers into a negotiated settlement. At the same time, they sought to mend ties with the tradi-

tional leaders who had collaborated with the National Party government, trying to give them "liberation" credentials by creating a mythology about the tribal chiefs' resistance to apartheid. In 1987, the ANC launched CONTRALESA (Congress of Traditional Leaders) as an organisation of "progressive" tribal chiefs, hailing this as "the chiefs coming back to the people." Since coming to power in 1994 following the deal with the white rulers, the Tripartite Alliance government has been in charge of maintaining the same profit system as before. They have inherited the structures that existed during apartheid.

Women's Oppression, Tradition and the Family

As part of administering neo-apartheid capitalist misery, the ANC and other Alliance leaders also romanticise tribal societies, including conciliating and promoting *izangoma* (witchdoctors) and other quacks who are euphemistically referred to as "traditional healers." The disastrous state of the public health care system—with public hospitals chronically overcrowded, understaffed and decrepit, if you can even make it to one—means that traditional healers are the only "health care" many ever see. Some women go to them for abortions because legal abortions in hospitals are not accessible. We stand for women's right to free, safe abortions on demand. We defend science and science-based medicine against "traditional medicine" *muti* and other so-called "alternative medicine," opposing government subsidies or other promotion of traditional healers.

The disastrous effects of the bourgeois nationalists' promotion of traditional backwardness were shown horrifically by the "AIDS denialist" policy of the Thabo Mbeki government (a policy in which Zuma, Mbeki's deputy until 2005, as well as the leaders of the SACP and COSATU,

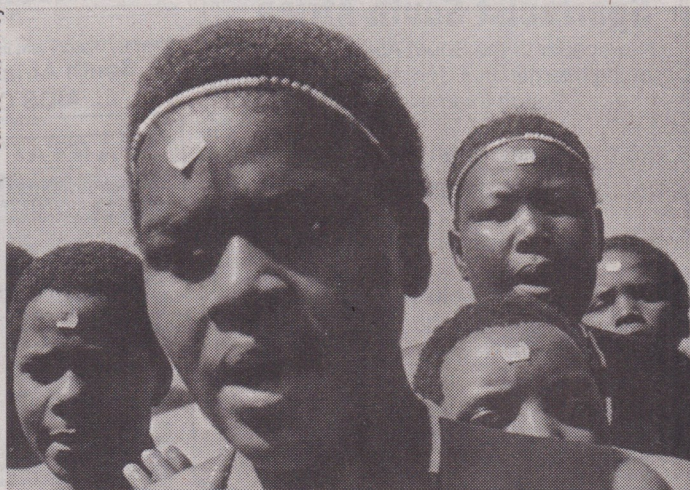
were complicit for years before later distancing themselves). A Harvard School of Public Health study showed that some 330,000 South Africans died of AIDS between 2000 and 2005 because a timely antiretroviral (ARV) treatment programme was not implemented. The meagre aid which the profit-driven imperialist system rationed out to Southern Africa was further obstructed, as Mbeki and other ANC leaders rejected medical science and actively blocked the implementation of an ARV programme, instead promoting traditional healers and other merchants of death pushing herbal and "natural" cures. Because HIV/AIDS is a sexually-transmitted disease, its spread has always been fueled by the subordinate position of women. We always opposed the deadly "denialist" quackery, and we continue to demand free ARVs for all who need them as part of the struggle for free, quality health care for all.

Besides their role in furthering ignorance, promoting anti-scientific prejudices and superstition, the traditional healers are part of the repressive political structure that runs from the community *sangoma* [traditional healer] straight up to the House of Traditional Leaders, which is part of the bourgeois state. A primary function of that repressive structure is to enforce the subordination of women to men. This is done through promoting and legitimising anti-woman, patriarchal practices. Along with *lobola* and *ukuthwala*, this includes virginity testing and initiation ceremonies like *uMemolo*, where young women are taught subservience to men and how to be the bearers of traditional culture to the next generation.

These backward traditional practices are remnants from an agricultural and slave culture. They are a big factor in legitimising and promoting violence against women, including some of the highest recorded rape statistics in the world. It is the most vulnerable women who suffer most under these

Women marked with supermarket stickers used to indicate "authenticated" Zulu virgins, 2001.

James Nachtwey



practices. For example, the thugs who practice *ukuthwala* usually kidnap women who are orphans or come from poor families. As always in class society, the traditions and culture which are upheld most vehemently are those which are acceptable and beneficial to the wealthy.

Strengthening the traditional courts means strengthening this repression of women. In many systems of customary law, African women fall under the guardianship of their fathers or, after marriage, their husbands. They have no contractual capacity without consent of their guardian and are not allowed to appear in court without the assistance of their guardian. They are excluded from political processes of the tribe and are sometimes precluded from obtaining land rights. Traditionally women are not included in *lobola* negotiations; sexual consent and other sexual rights belong to family members rather than the women themselves.

A common misconception is that women's subordination to men, like the patriarchal family of today, have always existed. Another misconception, particularly prevalent among feminists and others who oppose women's oppression from a bourgeois-liberal framework, is that the source of women's oppression is simply backward patriarchal ideas (mainly those of men). On the other hand, nationalists in particular apologise for forced polygamy, *lobola* and other anti-woman practices, romanticising them as uniquely African ways of showing "respect" between families. Another justification for these things argues that since women are often accorded prominent positions in traditional African practices, they can't be oppressive to women.

As Marxists we understand that women's oppression is material and that the view of women as inferior to men is a reflection of that material reality. Engels



Laurie Bloomfield

Durban, 1959: Apartheid police attack women in Cato Manor protesting crackdown on home beer brewing.

explained that women's oppression is rooted in the development of private property and the division of society into classes, both of which are tied to the development of the family. Early human societies lived in a form of "primitive communism." This meant humans hunted and gathered the bare minimum in order to survive, and shared this equally. The division of labour between men and women was based on the biological reality of childcare—i.e. women were responsible for bearing and nursing of the young—and implied no subordinate social status for women. The division of labour between the sexes was equal, both worked to produce the necessities of life. The functions of the household were a communal and collective responsibility.

This primitive social equality was overthrown when advances like the development of agriculture enabled humans to

produce more than the bare minimum needed to survive. This social surplus became the property of a minority, which were men, creating the first class divisions in society. This led to the development of the institution of the family as a means of passing ownership of property from one generation to the next. It also gave rise to the state, an organisation of dominance used by one class to suppress another.

The patriarchal family decreed monogamy for women so that men could ensure that their offspring inherited their property. This put an end to the communal family. Therefore family functions, raising children and household labour, became private and lost their public character. Women, confined to the individual home, became isolated from social production, which became a male sphere. As Engels wrote in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884): "The overthrow of mother-right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children."

So what is the role of the monogamous family for people who have no property to pass down? The family under capitalism also serves to rear the next generation to work on the land, in the factories and mines, and to serve as cannon fodder in the bourgeois army. It serves to train youth to obey authority, inculcates religious backwardness and generally acts as an ideological brake on social consciousness. In this way the institution of the family ensures the maintenance of class rule

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**Permanent Revolution:
The Only Road to Black Liberation**

**STOP !!
POLICE BRUTALITY**

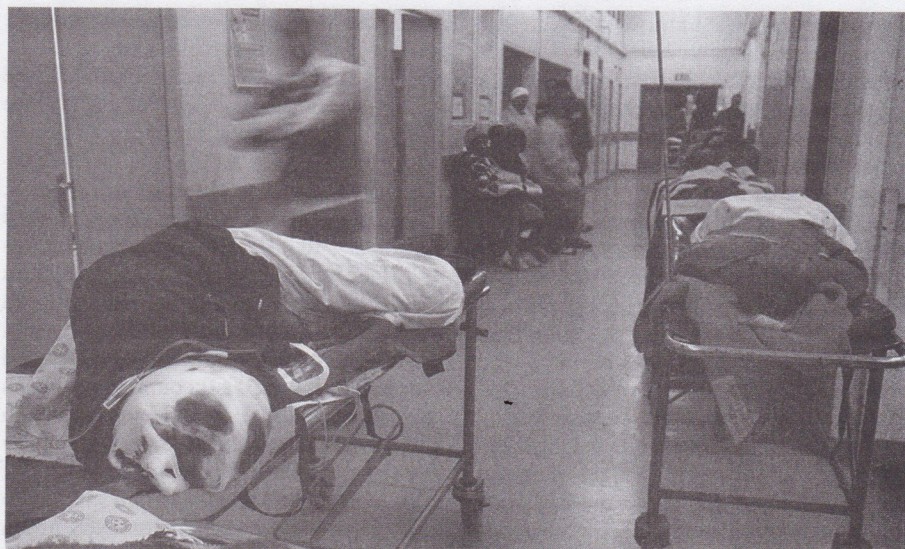
Forge a Leninist-Trotskyist Vanguard Party!

for the capitalists. It is the main source of women's oppression, an economic and social unit which is a mainstay of social reaction along with organised religion. It is also at the root of discrimination, legal persecution and other oppression of homosexuals. Despite liberal laws on paper, anti-gay bigotry is virulent in South Africa, with regular reports of murderous attacks against gays and lesbians, particularly in the townships and rural areas.

Unlike the feminists, who view women's liberation as a task of women only, we understand that the fight for women's equality must be taken up as a necessary part of the struggle to liberate the working class as a whole. This includes fighting to integrate women into social production. The trade unions must fight for free, 24-hour childcare to be available for all; for the extension of maternity leave rights for working women; for free access to birth control and free, safe abortions on demand; and for other demands to give women greater access to decent jobs and financial independence.

Fighting for these demands requires a political struggle to replace the current pro-capitalist trade union leaders—who, in the case of the COSATU leaders, directly subordinate the working class to the capitalists via the Tripartite Alliance nationalist popular front—with a class-struggle leadership. Struggling against the pro-capitalist union misleaders is a crucial part of the necessary fight to forge a revolutionary vanguard party. We want to open the way for women to play an active and leading role in the working class, which uniquely has the social power and objective interest to overthrow the capitalist system.

Especially in countries of belated capitalist development like South Africa, the fight for women's liberation can be a powerful motor force for socialist revolution. South Africa never experienced a bourgeois-democratic revolution. Instead, capitalist oppression was imposed by the imperialist colonisers on top of pre-capitalist societies, leaving in place and reinforcing all the accumulated backwardness of those societies, particularly brutal oppression of women. We oppose the "cultural relativism" of nationalists and others who justify barbaric, anti-woman practices like female genital mutilation and marriage-by-capture in the name of tradition, and we seek to put an end to such practices. There is nothing uniquely African about such practices—for example, *lobola* is a version of the bride price, something which has been practiced in societies in Asia and Europe at different periods, and still is today in countries like Afghanistan.



Gideon Mendel

Patients waiting for treatment at Soweto's Baragwanath Hospital, 2006. Quack remedies flourish due to wretched state of medical care for black masses.

We fight for women's emancipation through socialist revolution. We seek to get rid of the institution of the family, which is the source of women's oppression. The functions of the family—childcare, housework, etc.—can't simply be abolished; they must be replaced by social institutions. In a socialist society, the workers state would seek to provide free, 24/7 childcare which is easily accessible at home and in the workplace; communal kitchens and laundry facilities; and other measures which would free women from household slavery and allow them to participate socially at every level. This is only possible on the basis of a socialist, planned economy, where production is freed from capitalist anarchy and irrationality and organised and run according to human need rather than profit.

"Two-Stage Revolution": Betrayal of Women, Socialism

The SACP claims to oppose the Traditional Courts Bill. Last year, delegates at the party's 13th national congress voted to reject it outright, just a few months after the SACP Central Committee issued a mealy-mouthed statement calling for "more discussion" on the bill and arguing, "Aspects of the Traditional Courts system that are progressive should be retained, but aspects that are in conflict with the non-sexist, democratic and nation-building goals of the NDR should be rejected." Not surprisingly, though, none of this has caused any noticeable disturbance in the SACP leaders' harmonious relationship with the capitalist government that is pursuing this reactionary bill—a government which they are a prominent part of. To take one example, Yunus Car-

rim, a member of the SACP's Politburo, is deputy minister of the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs—the very government ministry responsible for the bill!

The SACP leaders have a long history of betraying working-class interests in the name of the Menshevik/Stalinist schema of "two-stage revolution"—known in South Africa as the "National Democratic Revolution" (NDR). According to this schema, which serves as an ideological justification for their historic alliance and interpenetration with the ANC, conditions are not currently ripe for socialism. Therefore, first must come a political bloc with "progressive" bourgeois nationalists. Then, in some far-off and unspecified future, this will evolve into socialism. Throughout history, the "second stage" has in reality always been the bourgeois nationalists slaughtering workers and communists.

In 1964, historic SACP leader Govan Mbeki wrote the following fine words denouncing the traditional leaders: "If the Africans have had chiefs, it was because all human societies have had them at one stage or another. But when a people have developed to a stage which discards chieftainship, when their social development contradicts the need for such an institution, then to force it on them is not liberation but enslavement" (*The Peasants' Revolt*). However, in the name of the class-collaborationist alliance with the "progressive" ANC nationalists, the SACP leaders went along with every grotesque conciliation of the chiefs, and today they are among the most craven apologists for the government of the Traditional Courts Bill.

In order to go forward in its struggles,

the working class must break with the Tripartite Alliance and with the reformist politics of class collaboration packaged as the National Democratic Revolution. In opposing the "two-stage revolution" schema, Spartacist/South Africa, section of the International Communist League, stands for the programme and perspective of permanent revolution developed by Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky. This posits that in countries of belated capitalist development, the outstanding democratic tasks historically associated with the bourgeois revolutions can only be carried out through the assumption of power by the working class, and that the working class, once in power, must fight to extend the revolution to the advanced capitalist countries to ensure the successful building of socialism.

South Africa is a particularly striking case of the applicability of Trotsky's permanent revolution, a unique society where European colonisation created a strong overlap between race and class through the brutal suppression and superexploitation of the black majority. To stress the intimate link between socialist revolution and national liberation for the black majority, and to combat the dominance of nationalist ideology, we raise the call for a *black-centred workers government* as a concretisation of permanent revolution. A black-centred workers government would unite the different tribal and language-based groups, and would include an active role and full democratic rights for the coloured [mixed-race, partly Malay-derived] and Indian minorities, as well as

for those whites who accept a government based centrally on the black workers.

The measures needed to dismantle the racist migrant labour system and to free women from domestic slavery underline the vital need for an internationalist perspective: Development of the rural areas, programmes to provide housing and childcare to all, etc.—all these things will depend for their ultimate success on linking up with an international planned socialist economy, meaning the extension of socialist revolution to the advanced capitalist (imperialist) countries of North America, West Europe and Japan. In fighting for that goal, we seek to build a Leninist revolutionary vanguard party of the working class that would champion the cause of the vast unemployed urban masses, the landless, immigrants, women, agricultural labourers and all of those oppressed under neo-apartheid capitalism.

For New October Revolutions!

Black women played a heroic role in the struggle against apartheid, but because that struggle was politically dominated by bourgeois nationalism, their hopes of liberation were unfulfilled. For a positive model in the fight for women's liberation, we look to the Bolsheviks of Lenin and Trotsky. The Bolshevik-led October Revolution of 1917 was a dramatic confirmation of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. The revolutionary government in the young workers state fought to carry out the Marxist programme for women's liberation. They immediately removed all impediments to legal equality, giving women the right to vote, breaking the hold of the church over marriage and divorce, and making these simple matters of civil registration. The Bolsheviks legalised abortion, set up literacy schools for young girls, outlawed discrimination against homosexuals, and abolished the concept of illegitimacy of children born out of wedlock.

But as Lenin explained, such legal changes are only the first step to the liberation of women. The second and more challenging step is laying the material foundations needed to actually replace the social functions of the family and liberate women from household drudgery. The Bolsheviks struggled, despite scarce resources, to provide large-scale socialised domestic services as a first step (see "The Russian Revolution and the Emancipation of Women," *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 59, Spring 2006, for a more extensive look at what the Bolsheviks did). But Russia was a backward capitalist country, and after the revolution the young workers state was economically devastated, isolated and surrounded by hostile imperialist powers. Lenin and

Trotsky understood that the key to building socialism in Russia was the international extension of workers revolution to the more advanced capitalist countries, particularly to Germany.

This revolutionary internationalist outlook was later trampled on by a conservative, nationally-narrow bureaucratic caste represented by Stalin, which came to power in a *political counterrevolution* and pursued the anti-Marxist, utopian programme of "socialism in one country." Despite the subsequent bureaucratic degeneration and Stalinist misrule, the gains made by the Soviet workers state were tremendous, not least for women. Trotskyists defended the Soviet Union against imperialism and capitalist counterrevolution, and fought for proletarian political revolution to oust the bureaucracy and return the workers state to the road of Lenin and Trotsky. This is our perspective toward the remaining deformed workers states today—China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea and Vietnam.

One of the places where the Russian Revolution had a profound impact on the conditions of women was Soviet Central Asia. At the time of the October Revolution, this region was even more backward than Russia, still in a pre-capitalist mode of production and marked by the hideous oppression of women under customary Islamic law. The Bolsheviks undertook systematic work among these women, seeking to win them as allies and demonstrate the liberating potential of the communist programme to the peoples of the East. This was captured by Trotsky in a speech given in April 1924, celebrating the third anniversary of the founding of the Communist University for Toilers of the East in Moscow:

"The sense, strength and the essence of Bolshevism lies in that it addresses itself not to the labour bosses but to the mob, the underdogs, the millions and to the most oppressed of the oppressed.... And this, moreover, means that the Eastern woman who is the most paralysed in life, in her habits and in creativity, the slave of slaves, that she, having at the demand of the new economic relations taken off her cloak will at once feel herself lacking any sort of religious buttress; she will have a passionate thirst to gain new ideas, a new consciousness which will permit her to appreciate her new position in society. And there will be no better communist in the East, no better fighter for the ideas of the revolution and for the ideas of communism than the awakened woman worker (applause)." ("Communism and Women of the East," reprinted in *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 60, Autumn 2007)

We fight, in this spirit, to build the revolutionary internationalist party needed to win new Octobers here and around the world. ■

A Spartacist Pamphlet \$1

**Black History
and the Class Struggle**

No. 23

South Africa: Marikana Massacre

**The True Face
of
Neo-Apartheid
Capitalism**



Massacre of 34 striking platinum miners by police in Marikana on 16 August 2012 (many did not break the workers' fighting spirit. More than 3,000 defiant miners marched to protest in Marikana on September 6.)

**Break with the Bourgeois Tripartite Alliance!
Forge a Leninist Party!**

No. 23, Feb. 2013 \$1 (32 pages)

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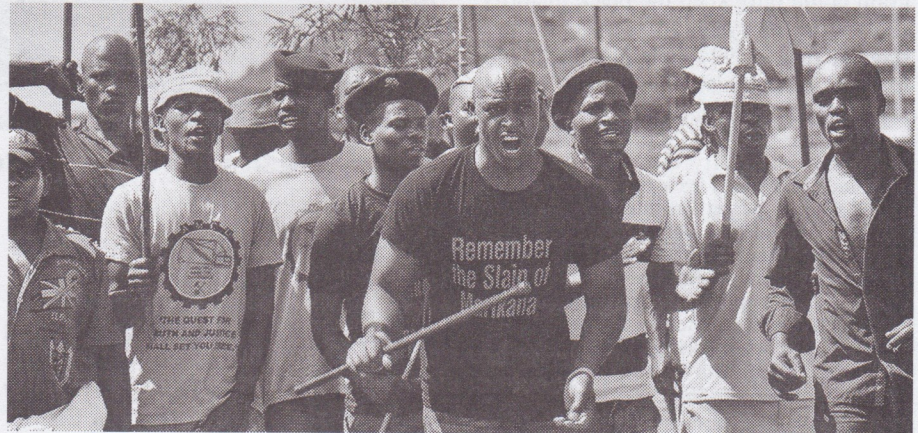
reprinted from *Workers Vanguard* No. 1039, 7 February 2014

South Africa: Strikes, Protests Mount Metal Workers Union Drops Electoral Support to ANC

FEBRUARY 4—Up to 80,000 members of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) in Rustenburg are on strike against South Africa's three largest platinum producers—Impala Platinum, Anglo American Platinum (Amplats) and Lonmin—demanding major pay raises for both underground and surface workers. Shutting down production of one of the country's leading exports, the walkout, which began on January 23, follows an eleven-week strike by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) against Northam platinum that ended with workers winning a 9.5 percent pay hike. The National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA), which organizes Amplats refinery and smelting operations but had been keeping its members on the job during the AMCU strike, also walked out on February 3 over their own demands. Union solidarity is crucial in the fight against the platinum bosses, who had heavily stockpiled the mineral in anticipation of the miners strike.

Meanwhile, police continue to terrorize desperate black township residents demanding provision of basic services like housing, water and electricity. On January 13, four people in Mothutlong, a township in North West province near the platinum belt, were killed demonstrating for what should be a basic right: access to clean drinking water. Ten days later, a man participating in a protest demanding housing was shot dead by cops in the Durban Deep area of Johannesburg.

Waves of strikes and ubiquitous "service delivery protests" demonstrate the increasing frustration of the mainly black working class and the impoverished masses with the continuation of their



AFP

On 23 January 2014, at outset of strike, miners rally near Lonmin's Marikana mine, site of 2012 massacre carried out by cops of ANC-led government.

degraded conditions 20 years after the formal end of apartheid, a system of legally enforced white supremacy. The economic structure of this capitalist society, based primarily upon the superexploitation of black labor, has not changed since Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC) were voted into government in 1994. Today, the overwhelming bulk of the country's wealth, including mines, industry and land, is still in the hands of white capitalists and their imperialist patrons in Britain and the U.S. While a few black faces have been added to corporate boardrooms, the mass of black workers and all the urban and rural poor struggle merely to survive.

During the August 2012 Lonmin miners wildcat strike at Marikana, the ruling Tripartite Alliance—a nationalist popular front comprising the bourgeois ANC, the Stalinist-derived South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of

South African Trade Unions (COSATU)—unleashed the worst instance of lethal police violence against the struggling black masses since the end of apartheid. In scenes reminiscent of the killing of black protesters at Sharpeville in 1960 and Soweto in 1976, cops gunned down 34 miners in cold blood.

Now, with these and other platinum miners organized by AMCU on strike again, the COSATU-affiliated National Union of Mineworkers, which has lost tens of thousands of members to AMCU, is scabbing on the strike. And COSATU has called for *more* deadly repression against strikers, demanding in a January 29 statement that police and company security protect the scabs! In fact, today police fired stun grenades and rubber bullets to disperse some 3,000 strikers at an Amplats mine shaft. Revealing the treachery of its own leadership, AMCU scabbed on a national NUM strike at the gold mines last year.

**Forge a Leninist-Trotskyist Party!
For a Black-Centered Workers Government!**

On December 10, the growing anger at the ANC coming from the base of society was on public display when President Jacob Zuma was booed at an official memorial service for historic ANC leader Mandela at Johannesburg's FNB Stadium. Mass memorials were held throughout the country for Mandela, who was imprisoned by the vicious racist regime for 27 years before being released in order to ease negotiations that, ultimately, led to a brokered end to apartheid rule. We Trotskyists defended the ANC and other opponents of apartheid against state repression. However, we never gave an ounce of political support to the ANC, whose bourgeois-nationalist program could only keep the black majority chained to the system of capitalist wage slavery. In the 1994 elections, the International Communist League opposed any support to the ANC, declaring:

"A vote for the ANC—including its Communist Party members and affiliated trade-union leaders of COSATU—is a vote to perpetuate the racist oppression and superexploitation of the black, coloured (mixed-race) and Indian toilers in a different political form. The workers and all the oppressed must be mobilized independently of the capitalist masters."

—"South Africa Elections: ANC's Deal with Apartheid Bosses,"
WV No. 598, 15 April 1994

Now, as working-class discontent continues to rise, fissures are opening in the Tripartite Alliance. At a Special National Congress in December, NUMSA—an affiliate of COSATU and, with 338,000 members, the largest union in the country—voted to withhold support from the ANC in upcoming national elections, projected to take place in April or May. Resolving not to support any other party, NUMSA, which is mainly based in the auto industry, also declared that it would cease paying into the COSATU/SACP political levy and would press COSATU to break from the Alliance. NUMSA had been joined by eight other unions in opposing the suspension of COSATU general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi last August on charges that he had had sex with another COSATU employee at the federation's headquarters. However, most of those unions have just resolved to maintain their electoral support to the ANC.

The Johannesburg *Sunday Independent* (19 January) reported that at the NUMSA congress "delegates were more militant than its national leadership, including outspoken general secretary Irvin Jim." While ANC bigwigs were not invited to the congress, guests included representatives of the imperialist U.S. and German embassies. On paper, NUMSA's decision on the elections marks a significant break from the ANC, but it was not on the basis of a



Striking NUMSA auto workers outside Volkswagen plant in Uitenhage, August 2013. EPA

principled opposition to supporting a capitalist party.

In an 11 December 2013 leaflet, our Spartacist South Africa comrades noted that the NUMSA leadership maintains its loyalty to Mandela's ANC, particularly the bourgeois-populist Freedom Charter adopted in 1955. The NUMSA tops also swear by the "two-stage revolution" doctrine of the SACP, long a formula for allying with a supposedly progressive wing of the bourgeoisie. While Irvin Jim decries particular "neoliberal" policies adopted by the Alliance, such as the late 1990s GEAR program and the current National Development Plan (NDP), he upholds the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) of the first ANC-led government, a blueprint for a "reformed" capitalism that did nothing to satisfy the masses' needs.

We reprint below the SSA leaflet, which was distributed at the NUMSA congress.

* * *

From all sides, the Special National Congress of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) on 13-16 December (now postponed to 17-20 December) has become the focus of intense interest. In particular, the congress is supposed to decide on a proposal that NUMSA not support the ANC in the 2014 elections (including refusing to pay a R2 million [\$180,000] "political levy" to the ANC), and another proposal to investigate "alternatives" to the ANC/SACP/COSATU Tripartite Alliance. These decisions could have a significant impact on politics and the labour movement in neo-apartheid

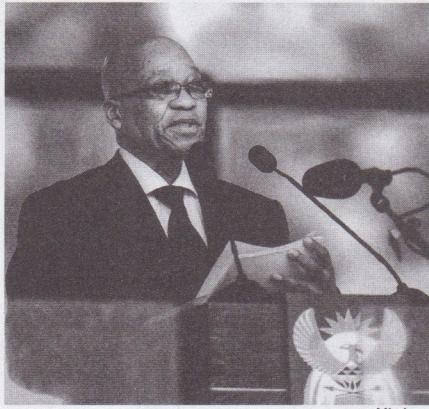
South Africa. Recognising this, the leaders of the bourgeois ANC—together with their cronies in the leaderships of the SACP and COSATU—have been working overtime to intimidate the NUMSA delegates and either force them to back down or isolate them. The congress is also supposed to discuss a campaign of political strikes beginning in February 2014 to protest the National Development Plan (NDP) and other government attacks.

Many militants in NUMSA (and other COSATU-affiliated unions) have great expectations that the congress will be a step toward ending the union's subordination to the ANC and the capitalist government, and seriously fighting for the working class and poor. The likes of NUMSA general secretary Irvin Jim and COSATU's suspended general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi have been using a lot of left rhetoric to build support among these workers, including acknowledging that "the post-apartheid state is a capitalist state" (Vavi), that the ANC is "bourgeois," and suggesting that their opponents in the Alliance play the role, under neo-apartheid, of "receptionists of white monopoly capital and imperialism" (Jim and NUMSA deputy general secretary Karl Cloete). This is cynical hypocrisy on the part of the NUMSA leaders and Vavi, given that they themselves have been very reliable "receptionists" over the last 20 years of neo-apartheid rule, strangling strikes on behalf of the bosses and repeatedly herding the working class as voting cattle for the bourgeois ANC.

The anger and disgust of many workers toward COSATU president Sdumo Dlam-

ini and others in the “anti-Vavi” faction of COSATU is understandable. Dlamini and Co. are open, craven apologists for every atrocity committed by the Zuma-led government—most despicably for the bloody massacre of 34 striking mineworkers in Marikana last year. But the role of Vavi, Jim and Co. has fundamentally been no different—they just spout some “critical” phrases and adopt an “independent” posture while pushing through the same class-collaborationist betrayals. Last year they stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Dlamini and the National Union of Mineworkers tops against the Marikana strikers, including supporting Zuma for a second term just a few months after the massacre. Earlier that year, Irvin Jim and other NUMSA leaders visited Zuma at his lavish Nkandla homestead, where they reportedly discussed the possibility of Vavi being promoted to Zuma’s deputy among other measures to smooth over tensions in the Alliance. And don’t think for a minute that they have “learned their lesson”: Vavi and the NUMSA tops are currently suing COSATU in the courts of the very same state—a *capitalist* state, as even Vavi now admits—to have Vavi’s suspension lifted. This is yet another betrayal of elementary working-class principles.

What’s urgently needed is a policy of complete political and organisational independence from the bourgeoisie, its parties and its state. A decision to not vote for the ANC in the elections would be significant, but on its own this is not enough for working-class political independence. The NUMSA leadership’s proposals are not based on any principled opposition to political support for bourgeois parties, but on the hopes of *pressuring* the ANC and



Xinhua



Rex Features

Growing anger at ANC from base of society: South African president Jacob Zuma (left) booed by crowd during speech at Nelson Mandela’s memorial service in Johannesburg, 10 December 2013.

the government to change some of their policies. This is clear from the NUMSA National Office Bearers’ (NOB) notes distributed to delegates of the NUMSA Regional Congresses on 23 November. Everything is blamed on “the neo-liberal NDP”—as if the capitalist Tripartite Alliance government hadn’t been carrying out constant attacks on workers, immigrants and unemployed people in the townships and rural areas for some 19 years before the adoption of the NDP, whether under the RDP, GEAR or some other label!

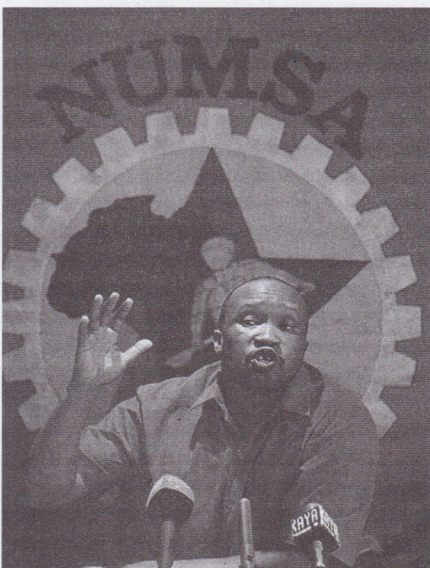
The point of the NUMSA tops’ focus on particular policies is to *cover up their own role* in propping up neo-apartheid capitalism all these years, and to channel the anger of the working class and poor into the reformist dead-end of tinkering with the system of capitalist exploitation and oppression—to “transform the state” or “fundamentally change the current socioeconomic strategy of the government,” as the NUMSA NOB notes put it. The capitalist government, and the state it administers, can never “fundamentally change” to represent the interests of the workers and oppressed. As comrade Lenin explained in *State and Revolution* (1917), the capitalist state can never be used to serve the interests of the oppressed and exploited classes; it must be *smashed, broken* through a workers revolution, and replaced with the dictatorship of the proletariat to suppress the capitalist exploiters and begin socialist reconstruction of society. In South Africa, where the unresolved task of national liberation for the non-white majority is strategic, this means a *black-centred workers government*, which would include full democratic rights and an important role for the coloured and Indian toilers, as well as for those whites who would accept a government based centrally on the black working people.

As a possible alternative to the Tri-

partite Alliance, the NUMSA National Office Bearers propose something they call a “United Front,” which they say would be “similar to the UDF [United Democratic Front] of the 1980s” and based centrally on the “full implementation of the Freedom Charter.” The formation envisioned by the NOB proposal, like the UDF of the 1980s, is a *popular front* and has nothing at all in common with the united front tactic as employed by the Bolsheviks of Lenin and Trotsky and the early Communist International. The united front is an agreement reached between two or more parties or organisations, which have *different programmes*, for joint action on specific demands. Each organisation retains intact its entire programme as well as the right to put it forward and criticise the other organisations in the united front.

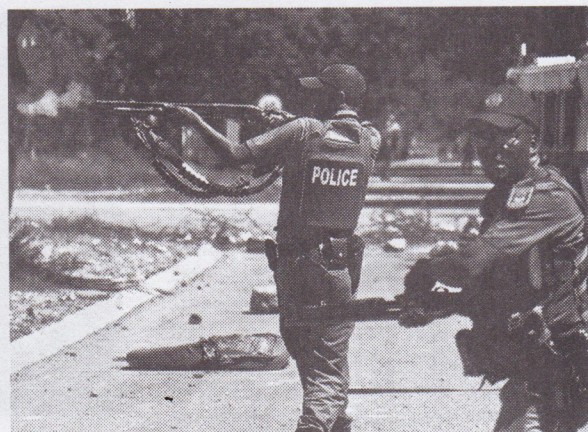
The popular front, on the other hand, is not about agreement for joint action on specific demands, but agreement on a *common programme* between working-class and bourgeois organisations—and inevitably, that common programme is *bourgeois*. The popular front is not a tactic to advance the interests of the working class, but a class-collaborationist betrayal of those interests. The history of bloody defeats suffered by the working class as a result of the popular front is long—from strangling the Spanish Revolution in the 1930s and paving the way for the Franco dictatorship, to subordinating the working class in Chile to Salvador Allende’s Unidad Popular and opening the way for Pinochet’s bloody coup in 1973, to the Marikana massacre in 2012.

Despite the myths preached by Jim, Vavi and the like, there is nothing “socialist” or “working-class” about the Freedom Charter—it is a *bourgeois-populist* programme. The ANC leaders have always been quite honest about its bourgeois nature, including the recently deceased



Gallo

NUMSA general secretary Irvin Jim.



AFP photos

Mothutlong, January 14: Residents of township near platinum belt built barricades during protest for access to clean water. Cops unleashed vicious repression, killing four protesters.

ANC icon Nelson Mandela, who emphasised in his 1956 article "In Our Lifetime" that the Charter was "by no means a blueprint for a socialist state," but rather aimed at making possible "the development of a prosperous Non-European bourgeois class." The Freedom Charter's rhetoric about "the people" sharing the wealth, etc., is nothing but a populist smoke-screen intended to obscure the class divisions among the black majority and keep the black proletariat shackled by nationalism—the mistaken belief that all who were oppressed under white minority rule have common class interests. The reality of the neo-apartheid system that resulted from the negotiated settlement with the white rulers has been a layer of mainly politically-connected blacks enriching themselves in partnership with the same Randlords and monopoly capitalists who dominated under apartheid. The super-exploitation of mainly black labour and grinding oppression of the masses remain unchanged. To try to foist the bourgeois Freedom Charter on the working class now means ignoring the experience from the past 20 years of continued suffering under this system and preparing the way for more betrayals and defeats.

Another alternative proposed by the NUMSA NOB document concerns the kind of party required by the working class: "Given that the SACP has become embedded in the state, we must explore the establishment of a Movement for Socialism." Just what this means is supposed to be determined by investigating "different types of parties—from mass workers parties to vanguard parties" and studying "the lessons we can learn from such countries as Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia and Greece." This could include everything from some kind of reformist workers party that would seek to administer capitalism on its own or in coalition with openly bourgeois forces—like Lula's

Workers Party (PT) in Brazil—to outright bourgeois populist parties like those led by the late Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia. None of these alternatives offer a solution to the burning problems faced by the working class and the poor, and they can't because they are all premised on maintaining capitalism.

The Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) has produced a bulletin for the NUMSA Special Congress with the title, "Sikhokhele NUMSA!" [Lead us, NUMSA]. In it, WASP "congratulates the NUMSA leadership for recognising the changed political situation post-Marikana" and "for tabling an agenda that addresses the key issues facing the working class" while writing *not a single word* of criticism of the betrayals by the NUMSA leaders and Vavi. This is not surprising, because the "mass workers party" that WASP seeks to create is really no different from the reformist party the NUMSA tops are contemplating—based on touching faith in the bourgeois state, narrow trade-union economism, ignoring questions of special oppression, and tailing bourgeois nationalism. The main force behind WASP, the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM), and their international cothinkers [Peter Taaffe's Committee for a Workers' International] have a long, rotten history of supporting "strikes" by cops, security guards and prison guards—who they grotesquely embrace as "workers in uniform." The DSM's predecessors were buried in the ANC up to the mid-1990s, loyally campaigning for it in elections and *opposing* the call for a workers party. Like Irvin Jim and Co., their beef with the ANC today is not based on principled opposition to bourgeois parties, but on the ANC's adoption of certain unpopular, "neo-liberal," policies like GEAR and the NDP, which they complain are a "betrayal" of the Freedom Charter. Thus, WASP recently tried (unsuccessfully) to

negotiate an electoral bloc with the bourgeois populist Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) of Julius Malema.

As a matter of fact, there already is a mass reformist working class party in South Africa—the reformist, Stalinist-derived SACP. While the SACP tops are widely reviled by many workers in NUMSA and other unions (and by militants in the SACP itself) for their wretched betrayals, the reformist, anti-revolutionary *programme* of the SACP is fundamentally what Jim, Vavi and others are offering up today as an "alternative"—from recycling the Freedom Charter, UDF and other treacherous popular fronts, to promoting "Two-Stage Revolution" and alliance with a mythical, "progressive" wing of the bourgeoisie under the label of "National Democratic Revolution." It is crucial that advanced workers learn to consciously reject this reformist programme in favour of the genuine communism practiced by the Bolshevik Party under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky—the revolutionary internationalist programme that was trampled underfoot by the Stalinists and replaced by its opposite.

We urge workers to study the true programme and history of the Bolsheviks, who were able to lead the only successful workers revolution to date in October 1917. That party was built on the basis of an uncompromising struggle for the independence of the working class from the bourgeoisie and for proletarian leadership of the toiling masses, acting as a revolutionary tribune of the people to oppose every manifestation of capitalist oppression. This is the kind of party that Spartacist/South Africa, section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), is trying to build. We have consistently opposed, on principle, any political support to the ANC or any other bourgeois parties and from the beginning denounced the post-1994 neo-apartheid

system, administered by the Tripartite Alliance government, as a betrayal of the struggle for black freedom. Today, it is necessary to assimilate the lessons of the history of international class struggle—including the last 20 years under neo-apartheid South Africa—to begin the work of building the revolutionary vanguard party needed to get rid of this racist system of capitalist exploitation. Toward that end, we raise the following:

1. Break with the bourgeois Tripartite Alliance! For political independence of the proletariat from *all* bourgeois parties—ANC, EFF, PAC [Pan Africanist Congress], AZAPO [Azanian People's Organisation], DA [Democratic Alliance], Agang, etc.

2. No reliance on the state that massacred the Marikana strikers. Cops and security guards out of the unions! The capitalist courts have no place in disputes of the workers movement. Labour must clean its own house!

3. Down with labour brokers! The unions must fight for full, permanent jobs

for all contract and temporary workers and for equal pay for equal work. Organise the unorganised!

4. For integrated, multi-ethnic defence guards based on the trade unions to fight against anti-immigrant attacks and defend working-class communities against vigilantism. Labour must fight for full citizenship rights for all immigrants and oppose deportations.

5. Down with the Traditional Courts Bill! This and other attacks hit particularly black women, who are triply oppressed under neo-apartheid. For access to free, safe abortion and birth control on demand, as part of free, high-quality health care for all. Oppose oppressive, backward traditional practices like polygamy, *lobola* [bride price] and *ukuthwala* [abducting girls or young women for marriage].

6. For a massive public works programme, at union wages and conditions, to maintain and expand roads, build hospitals, schools, housing, etc. For free, quality health care for all! For free education, open

admissions, and a state-paid living stipend through to the university level! Smash “e-tolls”—for free, safe, mass transport!

7. For a 30 hour workweek with no loss in pay to distribute the available jobs among all who need work and combat unemployment at the expense of the capitalists. For massive wage increases to close the apartheid wage gap, and a sliding scale of wages to keep pace with the skyrocketing costs of living. For a class-struggle leadership in the unions!

8. New October Revolutions—not the Freedom Charter—are the only way forward to national liberation of the black majority. For a black-centred workers government, part of a socialist federation of Southern Africa, that fights for international workers rule and an international planned socialist economy. Expropriate the bourgeoisie—from Jo’burg, to London, to Wall Street!

9. Forge a Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard party as a section of a reformed Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution. ■

Introduction...

(continued from page 2)

his subject in the colors of Democratic Party shills like M.L. King. In contrast to Malcolm X, Booker T. Washington was a consistent advocate of groveling before the white power structure and accommodating to segregation. His increased popularity today is a sign of the times.

* * *

The subject of last year's edition of *Black History and the Class Struggle* (No. 23) was the 2012 Marikana massacre in South Africa. The killing of 34 striking platinum miners by police on 16 August 2012 was a clear demonstration that the Tripartite Alliance regime headed by the African National Congress (ANC) is a capitalist government that rules on behalf of the owners of the mines and other industry, just as did the white-supremacist apartheid regime that was removed from power 20 years ago. Behind a facade of black politicians and a few black millionaires, the “new” South Africa rests on the same foundation as apartheid: the super-exploitation of black labor.

The Marikana massacre has been widely compared with the 1960 Sharpeville massacre that epitomized the apartheid regime's decades-long reign of terror against those who protested racist repression. The 2012 atrocity became a focal point for long-seething anger at the failure of the “neo-apartheid” regime to deliver improvements

in basic conditions of life for the working people and poor. Apartheid was shaken by mass struggles including by the emerging black union movement. But the leaders of the working class, including so-called Communists, have always blocked any prospect of a proletarian struggle for power. They organized working people to support the ANC and its program of a supposedly more humane and non-racial form of capitalism.

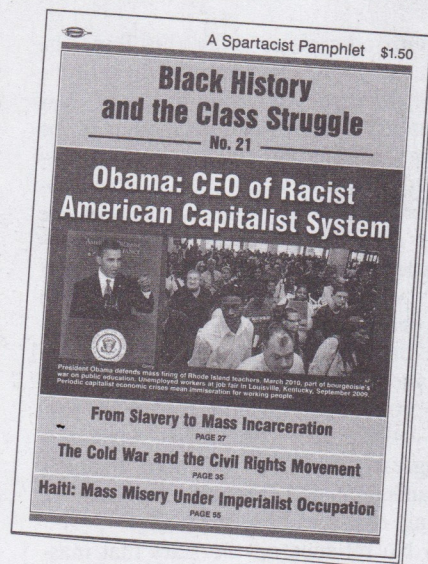
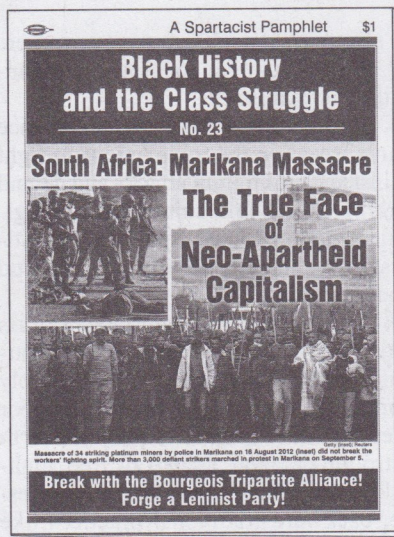
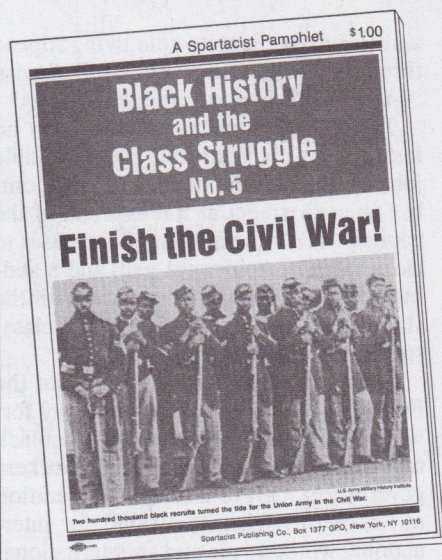
Intended to break the strike and intimidate other militants, the Marikana massacre did not work as planned. The example of strikers winning significant wage gains inspired more strikes by miners and other workers. The Spartacist/South Africa leaflet reprinted here was distributed to the December 2013 congress of the metal workers union (NUMSA), which had announced that NUMSA would not support the ANC in the next election. We are also pleased to publish an article by our South African comrades on the “Traditional Courts” that control the lives of 17 million rural South Africans. These courts, run by tribal chiefs, give the lie in their own way to the idea that the ending of apartheid represented some kind of “national democratic revolution.” The tyranny of these reactionaries has particularly terrible consequences for women, who are in all countries the preferred targets of religious backwardness and other expressions of “traditional culture.”

The apartheid regime that came to power after World War II intensified the system of segregation and racist repression

that the British imperialists had set up to control and superexploit the black population. After the discovery of vast deposits of diamonds and especially gold in South Africa in the second half of the 19th century, Britain took control through the war against the Boers (mainly Dutch-derived white settlers). The settlers had taken land from the native African peasants by military and other means. Now, needing to make people work in the mines, the capitalists more or less took away the rest. Nearly nine-tenths of the land was formally declared to be “white” areas.

The British established the rigid racial categories, pass laws and “influx controls” that controlled where people were allowed to live. A series of laws beginning in 1913 designated “reserves” (later called “homelands,” and commonly known as bantustans) where blacks were supposed to live except when employed in “white” South Africa as miners, laborers, domestics, etc. Apartheid only intensified the brutal racist oppression dictated by the needs of capitalism.

Today, South African mining is still done mainly by migrant workers, who come from other parts of South Africa or from neighboring countries. Miners go home once or twice a year to see their families. There are no longer any pass laws to make people work in the mines, but economic compulsion does the same thing. The ongoing platinum strike that began in January (see page 59) is now the longest strike in the history of South African mining. ■



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